




COMMUNITY POLICING in rural areas



Introduction

The 2015 police reform has changed the approach to policing in Ukraine. The reform is still underway, and some people have pointed out that the results have not yet been felt, but the law enforcement system has definitely received a new set of values from it. Among these values is the idea that the police and society should interact in partnership.

The last 6 years have seen the implementation of a host of incentives to foster police-community dialogue, from platforms for dialogue to the creation of community self-organisation cells. Such activities were initially concentrated in large cities, as the patrol police took over. Now the new challenge for the police and the public is how to build effective cooperation in non-urbanised areas where people have long been unable to maintain regular contact with the police.



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A community police officer

Ukraine has been implementing a comprehensive decentralisation reform since 2014. Local authorities retain a significant amount of revenue at the local level and are given no fewer new powers to deliver services to the population while adhering as much as possible to the principle of subsidiarity. A comprehensive reform like this entails that all processes have to be reshaped according to the new framework, and policing is no exception. From 2019, the Community Police Officer approach is being implemented as the next step in equally comprehensive police reform.

A community police officer is a police officer who lives and works in the community and spends more than 80% of his or her working hours in his or her own district. According to this approach, a police station covers no more than 6,000 residents in rural areas and 7,000 in urban areas. Therefore, one territorial community may employ more than one community police officer.



"The philosophy that a community police officer follows is one of delivering quality police services, giving attention to and dealing with safety issues across the community in which they have authority and form the core."

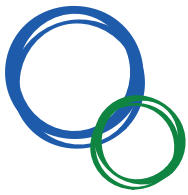
Maiia Breslavska, Head of the Community Liaison Office of the Preventive Activities Department of the National Police of Ukraine

Having a police officer present at all times and a clearly defined mandate for the police station is a great way to build partnerships with the community and to encourage community security projects. Police officers are excluded from community policing activities outside their community; their function on the ground is specifically focused on preventive activities. This is a chance for initiatives to go forward, especially in rural areas where the police presence has long been low.

Community police officers are funded through mixed channels. As employees of the National Police of Ukraine, they have the official status of a police officer and as such are paid according to the payroll thereof. However, working conditions (such as the availability of a workplace/police station, vehicle and fuel and lubricants) are covered by the community either directly or through raised funding (e.g., a workplace and vehicle) or through a subsidy to the police (e.g., for fuel and vehicle maintenance). Police officers are therefore accountable operations-wise to their superiors, while also being accountable to the community.

As of the end of 2020, the Community Police Officer initiative is being piloted in 233 communities in 18 oblasts of Ukraine: Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Luhansk, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi and Cherkasy. By March 2021, Ivano-Frankivsk will have also joined the list, and the number of communities joining the initiative will rise to 285¹. A total of 365 community police officers were employed as of the end of 2020.

¹ According to the Community Liaison Office of the Preventive Activities Department of the National Police of Ukraine.



Features of rural policing

The nature of policing in rural areas has a major bearing on the potential for community partnerships, as well as the emotional state of officers. As community interactions involve an emotional component, they should be seen as inextricable from the particularities of policing in rural areas. These may include:

1

Large areas and distances, low population density

Rural areas tend to be much less densely populated. This, on the one hand, lowers the number of calls to respond to. On the other hand, it contributes to a broad geographical dispersion of the needs to respond and patrol.

2

Lack of privacy in small communities

Ukrainian police officers acknowledge that gossip is an issue, though it is primarily a matter of spreading false stories after calls in the village.



"Some oblasts are big, the others are even bigger. As you go from one settlement to the second and third, the third will be aware that you are coming to their area. On the positive side, this serves as prevention, as they know that the police are coming."

Oleh Podterger, a community police officer of Hrechani Pody community, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast

3

The specific nature of offences and problems, the need for specific knowledge

The way of life of the rural population is a determinant for the types of calls received. Indeed, the concept of police-community partnership implies, in part, addressing issues that may be outside the police officer's immediate area of responsibility. Everyday life as it is lived in rural areas of Ukraine, for example, precipitates numerous offences or minor conflicts over land issues or domestic animals.

4

Features of the demographics and lifestyle

One way this is apparent is that there are usually a few young people living in the villages, and many retired people. The rural population usually has an income level and sometimes a general education level that is hard to compare to that of urban people. This factor, coupled with the divergent lifestyles of urban and rural residents has a major impact on the approaches that can be effective in tailoring communication to target given groups of people.

5

Self-sustained policing

A community police officer is often the only law enforcement officer in a rural area. However, the potential danger that can befall such a police officer during calls is by no means any smaller. Furthermore, the night patrolling of the area is also more difficult and more time is required to handle a call and collect and record all the necessary information to issue reports.

"When you work alone, you are a lot more attentive. You have no way of reckoning what will happen if you slack off somewhere. You can't afford it here. Already at that level (*by reflex* – author's note) you treat every situation with the utmost brevity right from when it starts to when it ends."

Andrii Shapovalov, *community police officer of PISOCHYN community, Kharkiv Oblast*



6

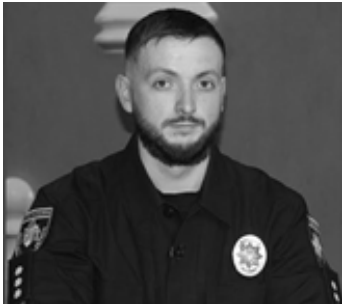
The combined functions of community police officers, community policing/protection inspectors, community groups and other police units

The initiative is new and there is still a lack of public awareness of the nature of the various structures. How various institutions interact and how they are perceived by the public is still a topical concern.

7

Limited funding and local budgeting

A community police officer is paid from mixed funds. More often than not, rural communities have limited funding options, and this, in turn, is likely to reduce the patrolling frequency and the range of actions that a police officer can undertake.



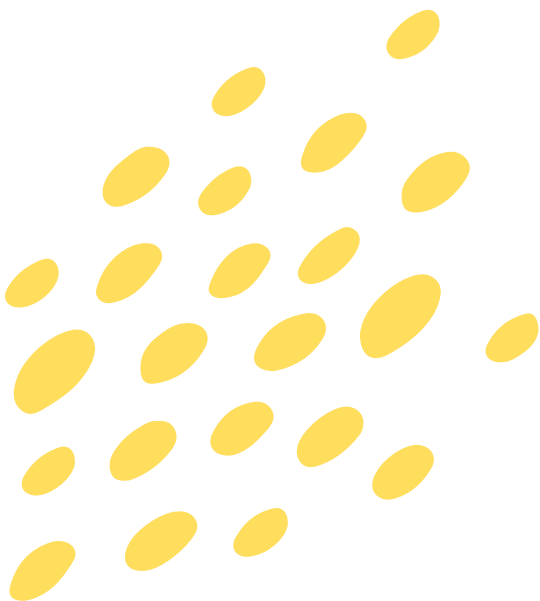
"To get security projects funded, they must be approved on paper (*passed in a local council session - author's note*). That way, we won't have to worry about whether there will be any money left over to run a project. There is a plan to implement certain safety projects. It's better to take them all in stride."

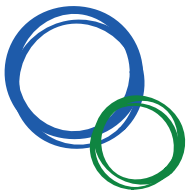
Serhii Shloma, a community police officer of Novooleksandrivka community, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast

8

Double subordination

A community police officer reports to the prevention sector in the oblast and is accountable to the community. This is sometimes a balancing act, a buffering role to be played by the police and the local government, necessitating that more time and emotions are invested in the communication process.





Rural police and community engagement practices

Using research on Ukrainian and foreign practices, the main initiatives most relevant to the local context were identified. They are:

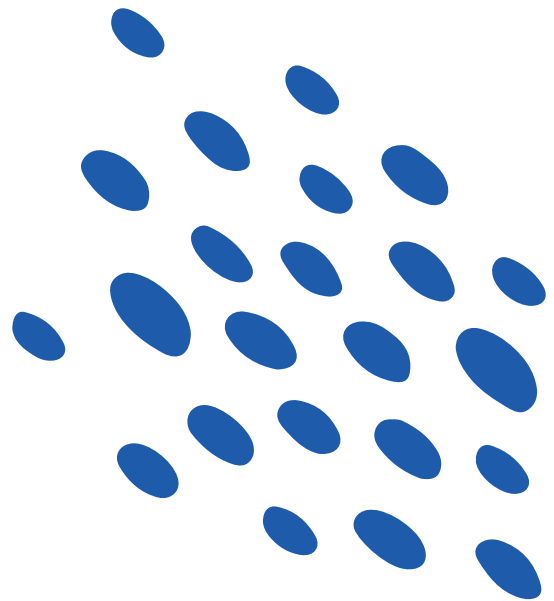
- The police use sociological survey methods to gauge public attitudes, experiences and levels of trust in the police.
- The SARO approach, i.e., focusing on activities on identifying the primary causes of certain issues.

Kolybaivka community case

In the community of Kolybaivka, a community policing group helps the police officer respond to calls. Notably, the group is made up of local businessmen and deputies. A community police officer said that bringing in such people also offers residents leverage. After all, when another person who knows them, with whom they have studied or with whom their children study arrives at a call, the level of tension drops straight away.

- Identification of 'hot spots' in the community based on a situational analysis, using area design techniques aimed at higher safety standards (environmental design).
- Providing a physical police presence to discourage so called non-targeted criminality.
- Combing communication styles to suit the population profile of the settlements served by the station, balancing formal and informal styles to meet the needs of the target groups.
- Soft policing, i.e., when various stakeholders are involved to tackle a specific person's problem, and when contacts that may give a person skilled assistance are put into use.
- Cooperation with religious groups when raising awareness among the community members.
- Involving the people of the community in patrols of the area by radio.
- Volunteer night patrols in distant villages.
- Neighbourhood watch in rural areas.
- Community police assistants.
- Official social media pages for police officers, including reinforcing the personal brand of a police officer among the community members.
- Joint communication projects with local media.

- A school police officer, civic education programmes for children.
- Creating mentoring programmes for adolescents from troubled families or who are orphans.
- Creating support programmes for adults experiencing troubles.
- Integration and dialogue activities between different demographic groups, especially ethnic minorities, among others.
- Initiating road safety projects.
- Involvement of police officers in charity events, such as police officers delivering gifts to orphans on festive occasions.





Conclusions and recommendations

Proceeding from the existing case study research in Ukraine, the analysis of survey answers given by the officers and representatives of the Ukrainian Preventive Activities Department, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1

A fairly high level of familiarity with potential tools for police-community interaction among community police officers. At present, the police have a lot of information about community engagement practices and techniques.

Recommendation. Police officers should continue the practice of building a collective knowledge base, introducing solutions to gather and systematise it, especially with practical cases that can be useful to their co-workers. Non-governmental organisations can help create appropriate directories or tools for quick retrieval and secure storage of information, even that of a sensitive nature.

2

Meanwhile, there is a rather low level of evaluation of the effectiveness of interaction tools using scientific research. Since the concept of police-community partnership-based interaction is rather new in Ukraine, there is still a rather low volume of Ukrainian evidence-based research on policing practices specifically within the interaction framework.

Recommendation. The police should request up-to-date scientific research on their activities that can be of practical use moving forward. This may involve psychological profiling of the population, measuring how various tools affect safety, long-term monitoring of target communities to determine the impact of soft measures and the like.

3

Local stakeholders have little awareness of the concept of police-community relations. The interviews with police officers suggest that the local people often lack knowledge both of some aspects of community policing and of the potential ways for them to get involved in community safety activities.

Recommendation. The police and non-governmental organisations should intensify their awareness-raising activities on the concept of police-community interaction targeting local government representatives. A shared vision of approaches will result in better interaction.



4

The need for time to deploy activities in communities and to build synergies between all levels. The collected success stories show that the greatest successes are being seen in the pilot Community Police Officer project. It is, therefore, reasonable to deduce that it takes at least a year or even a year and a half for the Community Police Officer role to be rolled out in a given community.



5

The community budget process has a strong influence on how well a community police officer can perform. This is why police officers should be proactive in planning their yearly activities, advocating for the necessary expenses to go into the annual budget and approving targeted local programmes. Otherwise, they will have no other option than to rely on budgetary leftovers, and even these may not be allocated promptly under the budget law.

Recommendation. The police should add local budgeting issues to the training programme and, if necessary, give crash courses to the officers on duty. Non-governmental organisations can assist in arranging training, preparing materials, etc. Given a large number of training activities for local government in the implementation of decentralisation reform, there is also plenty of written content available on the web.



6

The insufficient solvency of some communities limits policing and the spread of the initiative. The experience of extending the Community Police Officer initiative to the oblasts shows that insufficient solvency, in particular the lack of funds to purchase a vehicle or set up a police station, accounts for some major barriers to growth.

Recommendation. Non-governmental organisations and perhaps private businesses looking for initiatives for corporate social responsibility should look at the targeted needs of communities to launch such a project (cars, police stations).



7

The multidisciplinary nature of a community police officer requires ongoing training and specific knowledge, not all of which a community police officer acquires during his or her pre-service training. Community police officers deal with a wide range of issues that, at first glance, do not directly concern their line of work. The issues that are common in rural areas can include, for example, disputes over land boundaries, squatting or when someone harvests a crop on someone else's land and the like. Such issues require basic knowledge of laws on land, the environment and civil rights before they can be resolved. Moreover, the nature of the work suggests that improving skills in communicating with different groups, withstanding pressure, interacting with children and the like may be helpful.

8

Working in rural areas usually involves interacting with people of more conservative views, so police officers can act as ambassadors for modern perspectives on sensitive issues. Practice shows that very little time is devoted to such work now, other than the topic of domestic violence; however, there are quite a number of issues that can be discussed to improve community safety. This is especially the case in relation to the stigmatisation of persons with certain illnesses and ethnic minorities.

Recommendation. Non-governmental organisations can help arrange events on sensitive topics and help bring their importance to the attention of local self-government bodies. If this sounds appealing to them, local authorities can add targeted interventions for marginalised groups to their target programmes.

9

There is a need to offer support in introducing programmes to tackle domestic violence and provide remedial programmes to deal with abusers and ex-convicts. The interviews indicate that despite their intensive work in responding to domestic violence calls, police officers do not yet succeed in preventing re-offences from occurring.

Recommendation. Non-governmental organisations should encourage local authorities to organise such programmes, especially those aimed at remedial and social rehabilitation of ex-convicts since there is hardly any such practice in Ukraine. Abusers' remedial programmes are effective in some communities, but the institutional framework will need to be strengthened and receive more coverage.

10

Being a community police officer requires time invested in networking and cultivating relationships with local stakeholders. As a community police officer plays an integrative role, building relationships with decision-makers or activists in the community is vital.

Recommendation. Non-governmental organisations and local self-government bodies should encourage the use of dialogue meetings, the cultivation of police officer's advocacy skills, setting up cooperation mechanisms with regional organisations, etc.

11

In-house cooperation among police officers enables them to emerge as community activists and youth mobility facilitators. As community police officers enjoy a wide range of interactions, cooperation between police officers may contribute to 'bridge building' and evolve into the launch of inter-municipal or regional projects, thereby facilitating inter-municipal cooperation on other issues as well.

Recommendation. First and foremost, local self-government bodies should give due consideration to fostering community interaction with community police officers as a starting point to foster community growth.

Promoting youth exchange programmes (e.g., among members of the League of Future Police Officers) could be a way to boost local community involvement.

12

Today's challenges and opportunities encourage more widespread use of technology and digital tools, so police officers should gear up to make it a routine part of their toolkit. Even now, police officers are getting in touch with stakeholders and the community through electronic systems. This approach can spread through communities. Meanwhile, digital solutions have the potential to help analyse case-by-case safety-related factors. Beyond this, technical tools (like quadcopters) are spreading, and these are crucial given the large areas that need to be covered.

Recommendation. Non-governmental organisations and local self-government bodies can assist in the purchase of technology where the police can implement in-house integrated digital solutions to move towards a data-based approach to their work.

