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Ukraine's EU Accession in Practice:

Sectoral Harmonisation,
Regional Implementation,
and Public Perceptions

**Way Forward: From Legal
Alignment to Regional Delivery**



Ukraine's EU accession is no longer mainly a question of drafting EU-compatible laws. The central challenge is whether the state can implement, enforce and deliver the EU acquis across institutions, regions and communities under wartime conditions.

Ukraine has made strategically important progress. Energy integration is the strongest area, especially through synchronisation with the continental European electricity system and deeper cooperation with European energy institutions. However, electricity market coupling remains incomplete, price caps and public service obligations continue to distort the market, and gas-market liberalisation remains unfinished.

Progress in the other chapters is more uneven. Social policy and employment remain at an early stage, with major gaps in labour inspection, occupational safety, social services, accessibility and employment support. Enterprise and industrial policy shows moderate progress, especially in SME support, deregulation, digitalisation and business recovery, but practical implementation remains uneven. In justice, fundamental rights, anti-corruption, migration and border governance, reforms are advancing but remain politically sensitive and institutionally fragile.

The main bottleneck across all chapters is the gap between central legislative reform and local delivery. Regional and community-level capacity remains limited by staff shortages, weak coordination, budget constraints, uneven expertise and wartime pressure. This affects child welfare, labour inspection, local anti-corruption programmes, border management, human-rights protection, municipal energy resilience and business support.

Ukraine is politically ready to move forward in accession negotiations, but its institutional and territorial delivery capacity still needs strengthening. The next phase should combine strict rule-of-law conditionality with practical support for regional implementation, project preparation, local capacity-building and public monitoring.

KEY FINDINGS

Ukrainian communities understand the importance of European standards and are already applying many EU-compatible practices under extremely difficult conditions. Before the full-scale invasion, many communities introduced transparency tools, anti-corruption measures, digital services and social-policy mechanisms. Since 2022, local priorities have shifted toward standards that support survival, resilience and cooperation with European partners.

Energy is the clearest example of practical implementation. Communities are investing in decentralised generation, solar energy, generators and autonomous supply for critical infrastructure. However, high equipment costs, complex procedures and shortages of specialists slow progress.

In social policy, communities focus on veterans, families of military personnel, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons. Case management, veteran support, social taxis, rehabilitation-equipment services, childcare and local social-service initiatives show important innovation. At the same time, accessibility, psychological rehabilitation, adapted workplaces and sustainable financing remain difficult.

Enterprise policy is shaped by wartime survival. Local authorities try to support business, but investment risks, relocation, energy costs, labour shortages and weak local budgets limit results. For many businesses, EU integration is currently experienced mainly through grants and donor programmes rather than through systematic regulatory convergence.

Judiciary and fundamental-rights reforms are often seen as national-level issues, but communities recognise the importance of electronic court services, transparency, personal-data protection and local anti-corruption measures. In justice, freedom and security, the most visible local practices are community policing, body cameras, support for internally displaced persons and cooperation with local law-enforcement bodies.

Ukraine's EU integration will succeed only if national reforms are translated into clear, financed and locally understandable implementation mechanisms. Communities need training, resources, simplified procedures, peer learning, stable communication and differentiated support. Without this, the gap between formal Europeanisation and everyday local practice will remain one of the main risks for the accession process. Implementation gaps differ significantly between oblasts and communities. The accession process should therefore measure not only national legal adoption, but also regional and local implementation.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AND MEMBER STATES

- 1. Build regional delivery partnerships with Ukrainian oblasts and major municipalities.** EU institutions and Member States should create structured partnerships with regions and communities to support accession-relevant reforms in energy resilience, social services, SME development, border management, anti-corruption and fundamental rights.
- 2. Finance local project preparation, not only infrastructure.** EU support should advice on feasibility studies, design documentation, procurement planning, environmental and social assessments, maintenance plans and staffing models so that communities can prepare bankable projects.

3. **Create regional implementation benchmarks for accession support.** EU monitoring should track whether reforms are reaching oblasts and communities, including indicators on service delivery, staffing, budget execution, procurement quality, public reporting and citizen access.
4. **Strengthen independent monitoring and integrity safeguards at local level.** EU-funded programmes should include transparent procurement, open data, civil-society oversight, conflict-of-interest controls and complaint mechanisms, especially in reconstruction and infrastructure projects.
5. **Expand peer-to-peer cooperation with EU regions and municipalities.** Ukrainian communities need practical support from European counterparts on energy planning, social-service procurement, SME support, industrial parks, waste management, accessibility, local anti-corruption and emergency preparedness.

FOR THE UKRAINIAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

6. **Create a national regional-implementation framework for EU accession.** Each accession-relevant ministry should define what reforms mean for oblasts and communities, what local authorities must do, what resources are available, and how progress will be measured.
7. **Lock in Cluster 1 reforms and prevent backsliding.** Ukraine should strengthen judicial independence, protect anti-corruption institutions, improve prosecutorial accountability, adopt personal-data protection legislation, advance anti-discrimination standards and ensure credible fundamental-rights safeguards.
8. **Deliver an energy market and resilience package with local implementation tools.** The package should include electricity-market integration, a roadmap for reducing distortive price caps and public service obligations, protection for vulnerable consumers, municipal distributed generation, grid connection support and oil-stock planning.
9. **Deliver a social acquis package focused on community-level services.** Ukraine should adopt a modern Labour Code, strengthen occupational safety and health, rebuild labour inspection capacity, improve social-service procurement, and expand employment support for veterans, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons.
10. **Deliver an SME and industrial competitiveness package for regions.** The government should introduce the SME Test, reduce regulatory costs, strengthen regional business-support systems, support clusters and innovation vouchers, improve access to EU programmes, and link industrial recovery to European value chains, including defence and dual-use sectors.

11. Deliver a justice, freedom and security readiness package with territorial coverage. Ukraine should update integrated border management, Schengen planning, asylum procedures, anti-trafficking mechanisms, API/PNR legislation and migration governance, while ensuring that border and frontline regions receive the staffing, infrastructure and digital tools needed for implementation.

FOR OBLASTS AND COMMUNITIES

12. Prepare local EU accession action plans. Oblasts and municipalities should identify which EU-related reforms affect their responsibilities, set local priorities, assign responsible departments and publish simple progress reports.

13. Build project pipelines for EU and reconstruction finance. Communities should prepare investment-ready projects in municipal energy, social infrastructure, accessibility, industrial parks, business support, border infrastructure, digital services and public safety.

14. Strengthen local business and SME support. Regions should create or upgrade SME support desks, export-readiness services, business incubators, cluster platforms and advisory services helping entrepreneurs access national and EU programmes.

15. Improve local social-service delivery. Communities should prioritise veteran support, disability inclusion, psychological rehabilitation, childcare, supported living, social transport, deinstitutionalisation and services for internally displaced persons.

16. Use open data and public reporting to build trust. Local authorities should publish information on procurement, reconstruction projects, anti-corruption programmes, social-service coverage, energy-resilience projects and business-support measures.

17. Invest in administrative capacity. Regions and communities need trained staff capable of project preparation, EU funding applications, procurement, monitoring, reporting, stakeholder consultation and inter-municipal cooperation.

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