



Friedrich Naumann
STIFTUNG FÜR DIE FREIHEIT

UKRAINIAN MIDDLE CLASS IN THE EYES OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



Government
of Canada

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du Canada

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This publication continues to report the results of the first phase of the project “*Middle Class in Ukraine: Life Values, Readiness for Association, and Promotion of Democratic Standards*”, implemented by the Razumkov Centre and sponsored by the Government of Canada through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD).

The publication provides a detailed account of discussions in six focus groups conducted in May-June 2014 in several cities of Ukraine – Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and Kharkiv. Focus groups discussed key features and characteristics, life values, aspirations, and civic engagement of the middle class in Ukraine, and compared it with European middle class. A particular attention was paid to the willingness of the middle class to join efforts in defending private and public interests in Ukraine’s current situation.

This new publication of the Razumkov Centre Library will be useful to sociologists, political scientists, experts and journalists, and to all interested in formation of the middle class as a social foundation of civil society in Ukraine.

When using the materials, please refer to the publication.

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Miriam KOSMEHL,
Director for Ukraine and
Belarus, the Friedrich
Naumann Foundation
for Freedom

With the significant social and political changes in the aftermath of November 2013, the “middle class” seems like the favourite topic for politicians and commentators in Ukraine.

However, its role in the development of political and economic processes of the country is not being debated for the first time.

Before we can assess the importance of a social group, we first have to know what people it is made of. This is why the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom supported a detailed analysis of the Ukrainian middle class undertaken by the Razumkov Centre.

In addition, we assisted with this publication, which describes the Ukrainian middle class from the point of view of its representatives.

The paper is the result of discussions in focus groups. We consider it of great interest and importance, because it will provide further basis for understanding the role of the middle class in Ukraine.

It is commonly accepted that middle class stands for the influence of many and educated citizens, as opposed to the influence of a few large groups, with the rest of the population being excluded from rights and resources. A significant middle class is widely viewed as the pillar for democratic standards, as an independent group of citizens that protects liberal democracy by demanding participation, minimising factional fighting, and promoting policies for the benefit of all, rather than for special interests.

After snap parliamentary elections implementing a key demand of the Maidan, newly established parties declare funding coming from small and medium-sized enterprises as a viable alternative to the established parties’ alleged dependency on oligarchs.

To sum things up: The middle class is in many countries, and can be in Ukraine, the guardian of liberal democracy – if it is not captured by interest groups, no matter which societal class they are from. A strong middle class, independent of the government and administration, is a very good base for the core of a strong coalition of independent and well-educated citizens to provide checks and balances of power.

It is the aim of this paper to engage in further discussion as to who is the Ukrainian middle class as well as on the implications being middle class has in the views of its representatives.

I hope that this publication will raise your interest in the Ukrainian middle class and its role and potential – and wish you an enjoyable and informative read!

This is the second publication, prepared within the project “*Middle Class in Ukraine: Life Values, Readiness for Association, and Promotion of Democratic Standards*”. The first publication “*Middle Class in Ukraine: Identification Criteria*” contained, *inter alia*, some of the summarised materials of six focus group discussions, conducted in May-June 2014 in several cities of Ukraine – Kyiv (two groups), Lviv (two groups), Odesa, and Kharkiv. These materials primarily dealt with respondents’ identification criteria for the Ukrainian middle class as well as their self-identification in terms of social class parameters.



Anatoliy RACHOK,
Director General,
the Razumkov Centre

This publication presents the results of the focus group discussions on life values, aspirations, civic engagement, and willingness of the middle class to join efforts in defending human rights and freedoms.

Statements of the focus group participants show that their life values are concentrated primarily at the local level – their family, children, health, and work that brings a steady income, and contributes to family wellbeing. Also, among values mostly inherent to the middle class, the respondents stated self-esteem, opportunities for self-improvement, spiritual and cultural growth, patriotism, and respect for Christian values.

Civic engagement of Ukrainian middle class was ambiguously assessed. On the one hand, they spoke of the events in Maidan (the Revolution of Dignity), and highlighted that middle class played a leading role in defending human rights and freedoms in Ukraine violated by the former government. On the other hand, there were statements that representatives of the lower class took a more active role since “they had nothing to lose”.

Regional differences are also evident in assessments of the Maidan. It was positively assessed in Lviv focus groups, rather ambiguously – in Kyiv, and rather negatively – by the Odesa groups. Self-identification of the respondents is also notable – the majority of those who named their primary identity consider themselves first of all residents of their cities.

It turned out that personal civic engagement of most respondents was mainly limited to participation in the activities at the level of their communal hallway and neighbourhood; for broader civic participation, most of the respondents had neither need nor time. As to the participation in massive protests, the Ukrainian middle class is not ready for it as they “have something to lose”.

In general, among the barriers to joining efforts in defending democratic rights and freedoms are the low level of trust in governmental institutions and even lack of trust in their immediate social circle as well as disappointment in the results of previous mass protests.

However, the focus group participants did not rule out active engagement of the middle class in case of either rapid deterioration in living conditions or attempts of the authorities to limit socioeconomic or civil rights and freedoms. Thus, it can be assumed that current passivity and disappointment of the Ukrainian middle class have to do with “growing pains” – both its civic engagement and the role in the development of the civil society in Ukraine will grow along with its development.

UKRAINIAN MIDDLE CLASS IN THE EYES OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES (BASED ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS)

In May-June 2014, in the framework of the project “*Middle Class in Ukraine: Life Values, Readiness for Association, and Promotion of Democratic Standards*” the Razumkov Centre conducted six focus group discussions – two in Kyiv, two in Lviv, one in Odesa, and one in Kharkiv.¹

The main objective of the study was to identify the following issues in the process of group discussions:

- the range of ideas, thoughts, and attitudes of the participants on the middle class as a concept and a phenomenon; criteria for self-identification as middle class;²
- attitude of the participants of the discussion as representatives of the middle class towards other social classes and strata of Ukrainian society;
- ideas on characteristics and features, life values, interests and aspirations of the middle class in Ukraine;
- assessments of the level of civic engagement and the ability of Ukrainian middle class to join efforts in defending socioeconomic and civil rights and freedoms.

People of active working age (aged 30-50) who identified themselves as middle class, have higher or vocational education, are employed in various areas, have a permanent job or own a business, and earn an average monthly wage above UAH 2500 per each family member, were invited to participate in focus groups. Among the participants of the focus groups were self-employed persons, employees of both public and private institutions and companies, freelancers (painters, lawyers, translators), teachers, lecturers, doctors, engineers, military personnel, and employees of the service and trade industry.

In particular, the following topics were proposed for discussion: the class structure of Ukrainian society; comparison of the middle class with other classes (strata) of Ukrainian society; comparison of Ukrainian and European middle class; current and desired living conditions, life values, and aspiration of Ukrainian middle class; conditions for doing business in Ukraine; and factors that determine civic engagement of the middle class in Ukraine.

The results of the focus group discussions on these topics are presented below.³

¹ The groups consisted of 9-10 participants and were mixed on the basis of age and gender. In general, 56 people (including 31 women and 25 men) participated in the discussions. In the text, Kyiv and Lviv groups are labelled as Kyiv-1 and Kyiv-2, Lviv-1 and Lviv-2. Quotes are presented in the language used by the participants, with the style preserved as much as possible.

² The summaries of the results of the focus group discussions on these topics are published in the publication “*Middle Class in Ukraine: Identification Criteria*” – The Razumkov Centre Library, Kyiv, 2014, p.27-44.

³ The results of the focus groups reveal the overall vision of the representatives of the middle class of the situation in the society, and the logic behind the justification of their social position, actions, and intentions. However, focus groups (as any qualitative research method) do not allow to quantify the prevalence of ideas expressed in the focus group discussions among the Ukrainian middle class – it can be estimated only based on the results of quantitative surveys.

SOCIAL CLASS AND UKRAINIAN SOCIETY

When defining the place of the middle class in the social class structure of Ukrainian society, the discussion participants also touched upon the issue of lower and upper classes, their characteristics and features, relationship between them, and the attitude of representatives of the middle class towards them.

The criteria based on which the participants defined certain social classes or strata did not differ much from those used for identification of the middle class: material (income, accommodation, car, savings, etc.) as well as non-material factors – the level of education, profession, value system, social circle, etc.

The discussion of the issues of social structure was accompanied by some difficulties, which is understandable, given the fact that Ukrainian society is now undergoing a process of slow and controversial changes marked with significant social deformations. Hence, the discussions focused on belonging / non-belonging of teachers and doctors to the middle class, deputies of different levels – to the upper class, and pensioners – to the lower class; contrast between oligarchs and “asocial”, marginal groups.

Social deformations were likely to affect the respondents’ characteristics of the social classes and strata, and their assessment of interclass relations.

1. When discussing the division of Ukrainian society into classes, the participants often emphasised a significant gap between exceptionally rich people on the one hand, and very poor ones on the other. Thus, the boundaries of the middle segment – both of the middle and upper class – are rather vague and often elusive.

Kyiv-1

“We have the poor class, the middle class, and the rich. Now there is a trend for the middle class to split – there will be rich and poor”.

“...There should be middle class and middle class plus – not an oligarch but already a rich man”.

Kyiv-2

“In our country, there is no clearly defined structure of the middle class. It expands from the poor to the rich but they only seem to be rich. We also do not have the rich – a stratum located between the middle class and oligarchs”.

Possibly that is why – in addition to the upper, middle, and lower class – the majority of respondents in virtually all the groups distinguished between the oligarchs (or, ironically, “the elite”) and asocial (marginal) groups. Most of them do not consider oligarchs to be upper class by the level and sources of their income, or access to power (just rich and wealthy); their share is 2-3% of the country’s population. The asocial groups (the homeless, beggars, drug addicts), in the respondents’ opinion, do not belong to the lower class, where there are mostly people who found themselves in a difficult financial situation through no fault of their own; according to respondents, the asocial elements constitute 3-5% of the population.

Deputies, especially those of higher level, were positioned together with oligarchs, or “the elite” (“They are drinking from the same bucket”, *Lviv-2*). However, almost all the respondents agreed that, ideally, both deputies and civil servants should belong to the middle class, as it is in Europe, where they are perceived as “normal people”, and the law forbids them to use their status for personal purposes.

Some participants associated the upper class with “oligarchs”, and the lower class – with asocial group. That was especially evident when characteristics of the upper and lower classes were formulated in the course of discussion. The respondents spoke of features, which are generally characteristic of oligarchic and marginal groups.

Lviv-1

“There are the rich, and oligarchs, yes”.

“...Every day on the street we see the so-called ‘asocial’ elements. Those are very poor people who maintain a certain asocial lifestyle. But there are the poor who do not earn much because we generally have a low subsistence level – but they do work. They are social”.

“...In addition to asocial types, there is also the lower class – those people that are simply poorer than the middle class”.

Lviv-2

“...Politics is what concerns oligarchs, they are crazy about power”.

“We also identify oligarchs as a separate class, and they are probably divided somehow as well...”.

Kyiv-1

“Homeless people and drug addicts are not a class”.

“As for the lower class, these are the people with bad habits – they like drinking, they are drug addicts, etc., who have no aspirations. If a person has any profession, he can make it in life: as a salesman, a manager. He can become a senior manager, cannot he? Just perform well and put some effort into work. You can easily go from lower class to the middle class...”.

Kyiv-2

“Deputies are oligarchs”.

Odesa

“Oligarchs are a separate class”.

“[Below the lower class] are the homeless and down-and-outs”.

“This is called ‘marginal elements’”.

Kharkiv

“Oligarchs are the upper class”.

“I think that oligarchs are upper class”.

“Let us say this – nobody becomes an oligarch just like that”.

“No, maybe there are such people but really they are few and far between...”.

In one focus group, the respondents also distinguished the elite having defined it as a stratum of talented people who generate new ideas and are the authors of brilliant works of art – such elite belongs not to the middle class but to the upper class (which, in this case, is not associated with oligarchs).

Kyiv-2

“[Elite] is the people who are blessed, I mean not only financially. Spiritually too”.

“Scientists, creative professions. Philosophers. State machinery...”.

“There are many and various types belonging to the middle class – composers and scientists, and there is elite... Elite has never been poor because there are brilliant things and there are ordinary things”.

2. On the one hand, when discussing structure, characteristics and features of the upper class, the participants demonstrated their recognition of socio-economic inequality – the acceptance that there can be rich people in society, and that it is not a manifestation of social injustice in itself, “You should not be ashamed of being rich. Those are the remnants of communism that the rich should feel ashamed” (*Lviv-1*). **On the other hand, negative characteristics of the upper class clearly prevailed** – its representatives were compared to “oligarchs”, who from the beginning of discussion seemed to be excluded from this social class.

First of all, it was noted that the upper class are wealthy and rich people whose fortune allows them not only to meet all the family needs (in comfort, high-quality food, healthcare, high-quality education, recreation, etc.) but also to invest:

“These are the people who can afford to make major purchases. Who can afford accommodation [...] properly provide for their family, and leisure. People who do not save much on themselves and their families” (Kharkiv).

“...There are the rich where each family member has his own room and his own car” (Kyiv-2).

“...The upper class has enough money for everything, and they can afford to invest” (Kyiv-1).

Thus, in some statements on financial situation, the division between the upper class (“the rich”) and “oligarchs” still existed but in most cases this division was less distinct. From this point of view, living conditions of lower, middle, and upper classes, as described by different focus groups, also strike the eye:

“As for the middle class – they have proper accommodation. The housing conditions of the lower class are the ruins, ‘khrushchovkas’. The upper class representatives own separate houses, and not necessarily in Ukraine, [but] on islands. The difference is that the upper class owns property in Ukraine, and the oligarchs – abroad” (Odesa).

“...The middle class thinks, ‘We need to increase our living space’. They move from a two-bedroom flat to a three-bedroom flat. The upper class thinks, ‘We should build another 1000 square metres palace’. So they build Mezhyhirya” (Kyiv-1).

The participants often expressed doubt that representatives of the upper class made their fortune themselves or made an honest living rather than inherited their capital or were lucky to get “on the right track”.

Kharkiv

“[These people] are more affluent. Who at some point, somewhere, got on the right track”.

“Money defines everything”.

“It does not mean that these people studied well but they definitely have some sort of educational document”.

“They are the people who earned their own money — they have to be well educated, i.e. very intelligent. However, again, these people have children who lead a totally immoral lifestyle so...”.

“These are the people who, I think, have inherited some capital”.

According to focus group participants, representatives of the upper class also try to avoid paying taxes, they work less by exploiting the labour of others, and the upper-class businessmen seek power, i.e. they wish to become oligarchs.

Lviv-1

“...The upper class — they work less”.

“They do not have to think...”.

“They use services of the middle class”.

Kyiv-2

“They are always on holidays. Take, for example, the Verkhovna Rada — they are lazy. Assistants are there working for them”.

Odesa

“They — the upper class — do not pay taxes, the middle class does”.

Kharkiv

“They work less, manage more, and drive expensive cars. That is my opinion”.

Kyiv-1

“...When you are in business, you already cannot stop. The upper class wants to get even higher. When they have a lot of money, they think about power. For power gives money. The investments are there, it gets hard to stop”.

Kyiv-2

“The upper [class] — they aim higher and higher. That is, ‘to get into politics and steal’. What is big business based on? Tenders. However, ...I will not win unless I am in politics”.

The following characteristics of the upper class were often mentioned: materialism and yet – prodigality, abundance of good things in life and yet – unwillingness to help those in need. Indeed, although representatives of the upper class have “more money”, they are less likely to help the weak since “they are more greedy” (*Kyiv-1*); they do not participate in charitable activities “because the upper class does nothing for free” (*Lviv-1*).

Most participants even deny any similarity between the value systems of the upper and middle class. Indeed, representatives of the upper class, unlike the middle class, are not patriots. The upper class does not value family. Its core values are power and money – going for the gold prevails over “the sense of humanity” (*Odesa*).

Kharkiv

“They have no values”.

“They value only power and money”.

Lviv-2

“[Is family a value?] For the rich, probably not. If their business is good, I think they walk over dead bodies... Patriotism – they do not have any...”.

“Patriotism is mostly inherent to the middle class... For the lower class – they have some other problems, they have to think how to feed their children. The rich – how to get a new Lexus?”

Odesa

“For the upper class, the exponent goes in the direction of material values”.

“The upper class are not patriots”.

“More cosmopolitan due to financial possibilities”.

“For the upper class, family is a different value. They get married ten times. Changing wives is like changing cars...”.

“...The upper class will not go [fight], and they will pay their children off”.

Kyiv-1

“Spiritual level but a poor person can also have it high”.

“The rich may not have it, there are examples”.

The respondents seem to describe the upper class as having no morals. Representatives of the upper class are immoral, capable of violating universal norms both in personal life and business, and their moral qualities are regarded as inferior not only to the middle class but also to the lower class. The statements by focus group participants created an impression that when they were describing the moral image of the upper class, they often identified it with “oligarchs”.

Kyiv-2

“– I think that a lack of money can spoil people because when there is not enough of it, people can go steal. However, too much money also spoils people.

– Even more.

– Any class can steal, the question is how much?

– Both are extreme — upper and lower.

– Lower class is Shura Balahanov. Upper is Yanukovych. It all depends on a person, not on the class he belongs to.

– The upper class, they still steal more”.

Lviv-1

“The upper class always violates, say, ‘you shall not steal’, ‘you shall not kill’...”.

Odesa

“– [They can] snatch from the living and the dead.

– There is a song from the movie ‘Elektronic’, ‘I am completely certain that you should be certain about nothing’. No principles at all.

– No, why no principles? For them — to stand someone up, and take the money. Take the business, just like the Donetsk people did when they came to Odesa. They lack the integrity.

– ‘Drown’ your neighbour, permissiveness...

– **Maybe it is typical of oligarchs rather than the upper class?**

– The upper class behaves like oligarchs.

– Two principles inherent to oligarchs: the end justifies the means, and the other one — what money cannot buy, big money can.

– **However, the upper class is not oligarchs...**

– Still. They are simply poor oligarchs.

– I agree. They should be combined with oligarchs.

– Like Yanukovych and his family”.

The upper class does not truly care for their own children and their proper upbringing. Each focus group discussed that the upper-class families usually delegate the upbringing of their children to “nannies, governesses”, and private kindergartens. Parents are either preoccupied with themselves, or think such upbringing is prestigious and fits their social status. Usually, instead of parental love and attention, children get the money. The values parents teach them are “purely materialistic” — “love of money”. Respectively, children are “spoilt, arrogant”, “they know they can get anything”. Therefore, despite parents’ ability

and willingness to send their children to study abroad, they do not want to study and act “dissolutely”. “Usually, rich kids do not want to study. They have everything...” (*Odesa*); “Famous people rarely come from rich families” (*Kyiv-1*).

Lviv-1

“The upper class can afford to send children to study abroad”.

“The upper class — because of their profession, they are somehow separated from their children”.

“They hire governesses, etc. I have seen very rich people — they give very little attention to a child’s upbringing, his outlook, and spiritual needs”.

“They communicate less with their children, and children usually feel less love from them. You can say so”.

Lviv-2

“...Take the upper class — they usually hire governesses, nannies and so on... They will not ask a child — what did you do today?”

Kyiv-1

“There is also [responsibility for children] but they do not give that much attention to them, they hire nannies for their children, send them to study abroad...”.

“They talk to children less”.

“The upper class also gives attention. It is just that time-saving is important to them”.

“There is always a nanny there”.

Odesa

“The upper class people have more opportunities to send children to study abroad”.

“But the upbringing! In the upper class, children are generally badly brought up. For their principle is that everything can be bought, including education”.

“Nannies take care of those children, and children are discouraged to interact with parents”.

“They love themselves more...”.

“Then, their love is expressed in money”.

3. The discussion of structure, characteristics and features of the lower class revealed a more tolerant attitude of the participants towards it in general, as compared to their attitude towards the upper class. However there were cases when the lower class was identified with asocial groups and, thus, sometimes given rather harsh and negative characteristics.

Most respondents identified lower class with those who “make the ends meet” — whose income per family member is at or below the subsistence level (“enough to eat”) — the disabled, and also pensioners who worked all their lives but lost their savings through no fault of their own, and now have to live on a tiny pension.

As a result, these people are struggling and have only one “privilege”, compared to the asocial elements – registration, which allows them to get certain social benefits, healthcare, etc.

Kyiv-1

“The lower class is at the level of survival. People do not have enough for living wage, from pay check to pay check... You pay for public utilities – and you do not have enough for anything else. They cannot save money, even for a holiday”.

“The poor are surviving. They hardly make ends meet”.

“Compared to the marginals, [for the lower class] they receive an employment package, since they still have a degree, and there is an access to healthcare because they have registration”.

“Pensioners cannot belong to the lower class”.

“What happened in the country in the 90s is that their savings were gone, poor people had been saving... My parents went to work to the North of Russia. They wanted to buy me a flat...”.

Kyiv-2

“It seems to me that the lower class is more spiritual. They focus on spiritual values and think less about goods”.

“I think the lower class thinks more about how to earn more money”.

“How to feed yourself. Mostly it is like that”.

“They have to survive”.

“There are also people in the lower class who do not worry about anything. You earn, have a drink, and that is it...”.

“The lower class also tries to make more money”.

Lviv-1

“Whom do we identify with the lower class? Usually, there is a subculture of poverty. There is terrible anger. What is there? Another day passed – good...”.

“We are not talking about the asocial people”.

“We are talking about those two old men who barely live off that pension. Make ends meet”.

“The lower class as well [wants to make more money], they are struggling in those jobs making money...”.

Odesa

“Alcoholics belong to the lower class. They drink and eat”.

“They are the disabled, and pensioners who live off the pension only!”

“There was a novel ‘*The Bull’s Hour*’ by Yefremov [remember]? The lower class are ‘the short-lived’...”.

Kharkiv

“The lower class means minimum wage”.

“The living wage”.

“They use subsidies”.

The focus group participants shared rather compassionate attitude towards the lower class (except in cases when it was identified with asocial groups); the respondents described its representatives more positively than those of the upper class. Indeed,

it was noted that the situation of a representative of the lower class is even less stable than that of the middle class. He has no confidence in future, and cannot afford anything of high quality – from housing and food to healthcare but, at the same time, he is “more spiritual” (*Kyiv-2*); the lower class, for instance, (“although it should have been the upper) often tries to engage in charitable activities “but this is not necessary and should not be done” because “they hardly make ends meet” (*Lviv-1*); the lower class cares for “the country’s future” more than the upper class (*Odesa*); representatives of the lower class usually try to do their best for their children to be able to achieve a higher social level – join the middle class (*Lviv-2*).



However, among features characteristic of the lower class, the respondents mentioned “a subculture of poverty”, which, as it is known, forms in a person such psychological traits as lack of self-belief, social isolation, indifference or hostility towards social environment, including the immediate one. Noting the presence of these features among representatives of the lower class, the respondents mostly took it with understanding but also mentioned that it has, along with financial difficulties, an adverse affect both on searching the way out of poverty and on raising their children, which results in children being “raised in the streets”. However, children from poor families are often better brought up and study harder than children from upper-class families, albeit their situation is much worse.⁴

Odesa

“Among the lower class, people do not care for each other”.

“They are just timid”.

“They are more insecure. Tense”.

“Among the lower class, there is a problem with the upbringing of children in general. There is actually a category in the lower class – ‘professional’, chronically large families. They do not even think about upbringing, there is not enough money”.

⁴ It seems clear that children from low-income families also need additional assistance from teachers. However, how can similarly poor teachers help them? An eloquent dialogue in this regard took place in one of the groups, “I have students from families with various income. Everyone pays the same price but some of them have maids and a driver. There are also those who make ends meet but they are more respectful when the former are used to the fact that they can ‘buy’ anything. Sometimes rich kids do not study well – dummy – when a girl from a poor family is working hard...”. – “Would you work additional hours with her?” – “Well, excuse me, but I also have to make money”.

Kharkiv

“...These are people who... Well, I think they may be able to do something to make it to the middle class. However, given all their personal circumstances — maybe, some inner fear or something else — they cannot”.

“Well, we say straight away that he makes very little money. If he does not earn much, he cannot give a child the most basic things, can he?”

“Inner anger and considerable envy emerge. When envy and inner anger emerge, you always feel this drawback. Indeed, inner psychological state of the lower class...”.

Kyiv-2

“Maybe, the lower class teaches the children how to survive... To survive — to earn, save, strive for something, maybe fight your way...”.

4. Focus group participants agreed that in Ukrainian society, the attitude and relationships between people depend on what class they belong to. However, the participants’ opinions on the nature and depth of the difference in attitude and relationship between classes are divided.

Indeed, in some groups, the respondents noted that it has been a feature of our times in particular — people used to be more open, talked to each other more, and there used to be no strict social and class boundaries. In others, interaction within “their own” class was perceived as a natural phenomenon. Although in some groups interaction between representatives of the middle class and representatives of the lower class was recognised as “demeaning” and “uninteresting”, it was considered “normal” in others, just as the interaction with representatives of the upper class.

Kyiv-2

“[Attitude towards you depends on what class you belong to]... The Ukrainian society is sick! We are envious, we are angry! Perhaps, life has led us to this...”.

“...In the Soviet times, there was more personal interaction between people, more openness... And the government is using it: they have torn the society — and there is less interaction. Both between classes and between people in general”.

Lviv-2

“This is the way it is in Ukraine — the middle class interacts with the middle class... It is already not prestigious to interact with lower class”.

“I think those of one kind attract, and, firstly, it is not interesting to talk to, I beg your pardon, a dumb person who cannot pull two words together, and, secondly, if you aim higher, and if you are surrounded by poor and dumb people, you will not, I beg your pardon, go far...”.

Kharkiv

“...Each class mainly interacts with their own kind”.

“I think that it is the middle class that interacts well both with the lower class and the upper class... The middle class is more open than other classes. [Representatives of the middle class] — they are right in the middle, yes... They still understand the difficulties of the lower class... — at the same time, they aim higher. This is the ‘golden mean’ that probably enables [such interaction]”.

“Yes. He understands the lower but tries to interact with the upper class, catch up with them...”.

Kyiv-1

“...There is a relationship [of the middle class with the lower class] since we do not have a caste system”.

Focus groups gave controversial assessments of relationship and interaction between the middle and upper classes. On the one hand, they believe that representatives of the upper class, unlike middle class, have no respect for others (of lower social status) and behave scornfully and haughtily, and even use security guards to protect them. On the other hand, the middle class does not seek any contact with the upper class and is “green with envy” and feels sorry that it has to work for them.

Odesa

“When a person from high society is more arrogant and haughty, a person from the middle class is more polite and behaves more naturally. He has a sense of dignity, and, at the same time, there is no arrogance”.

“A sign of the upper class is the presence of security guards”.

Kharkiv

“...Representatives of the ‘elite’ — they have no respect for others”.

“This is a test. When people have big money, a lot of them just lose themselves”.

“Those who are above the middle class eventually stop regarding those who are below as human beings, or something...”.

Kyiv-1**— The attitude of the middle class to the upper class?**

“Envy, being green with envy — they have stolen!”

“No attitude — we do not interact, we do not contact each other”.

“The middle class serves the upper class, works for it...”.

In general, the respondents frequently noted the proximity of the middle class to the lower rather than to the upper class. This is due to a significant difference



in financial security of the middle and upper class – “Our middle class is closer to the poor” (*Kyiv-1*), even in terms of physical space, “We are all running around – in transport, in the underground, at work, in stores” (*Kyiv-2*); instability of the situation and status of the middle class, “For us, there is a very thin line: today you are the middle class, tomorrow – the lower” (*Kyiv-1*); and their experience of vertical mobility, “In the last 30 years, looking at myself,

each of us has moved back and forth between the middle and lower class several times. Therefore, these lines are blurred” (*Kyiv-2*).

Quite symbolic in this sense is a suggestion of the same life motto both for the middle class and lower class in one of the focus groups: “Maybe tomorrow will be better” (*Lviv-1*).

Summing up the above, the focus group participants distinguish between – in addition to the upper, middle, and lower classes – the group of “oligarchs” and asocial elements (marginal groups). According to them, the middle class shares rather negative attitudes towards the upper class. During discussions, the latter was often identified with “oligarchs” for whom “going for gold” prevails over a sense of humanity. There is a social gap between the upper and middle class. According to the respondents, the upper class is shut off from interaction with others and separated from them with security guards.

Attitudes towards lower class are somewhat friendlier but this class is often associated with asocial and marginal groups, and in this case causes contempt rather than compassion. However, most respondents, whilst identifying themselves with the middle class, feel closer to the lower class rather than to the upper class.

Based on statements of the focus group discussions, we can conclude that social classes in Ukrainian society are alienated from each other, that is used by the government, in particular, to further deepen this alienation and “tear the society apart”.

The opinions of the focus group participants on parenting in families of the upper and lower classes, were likely affected by the phenomena of inherited wealth and inherited poverty, which represent a real threat to development of “the middle class society” in Ukraine.

At the end of discussions, the focus group participants were asked to create certain life mottoes for the upper, middle, and lower classes. As it turned out, the suggestion proved to be successful – the mottos vividly reflected the respondents’ understanding of and attitude towards classes (as well as the social class they identify themselves with).

LIFE MOTTOES FOR DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES

For the Upper Class

“Work less, earn more!”, “Have stolen today – will steal more tomorrow” (*Lviv-1*)

“Try everything!” (*Lviv-2*)

“What have not I tried yet?”, “Make it!”, “Surprise me!”, “Save and grow!” (*Kyiv-1*)

“Higher, higher, and higher!”, “Get all out of life!”, “Share with the people – throw some crumbs” (*Odesa*)

“There is never too much money!”, “Share with your neighbour” (*Kharkiv*)

For the Middle Class

“Work a lot, earn a lot”, “Maybe tomorrow will be better” (*Lviv-1*)

“If not me, then who?” (*Lviv-2*)

“Go! Make money”, “When I get rich!”, “This is stability, this is development” (*Kyiv-1*)

“Do not go forward, do not fall behind!”, “The rich should be ‘dekulakised’!” (*Kyiv-2*)

“Ahead to a happy future!”, “Life is not over yet, strive for the best!”, “Ahead to changes!” (*Odesa*)

“Take a step – and the path will appear!”, “Ahead to the horizon!” (*Kharkiv*)

For the Lower Class

“Maybe tomorrow will be better”, “Hope springs eternal” (*Lviv-1*)

“Survive!” (*Kyiv-1*)

“Survive till the pay check” (*Kyiv-2*)

“Another day passed – good” (*Lviv-1*)

“Lived today – good”, “Hang on until tomorrow”, “Strive for the better!”, “Crawl but go!”, “We have nothing to lose but spare chains, we will raze the old world, and then...” (*Odesa*)

“Study! Work!” (*Kharkiv*)

Comparative Mottoes

(*Kyiv-2*)

For the middle class: confidence in tomorrow; *for the lower* – to survive till the evening; *for the upper* – confidence in the next few years.

For the middle class: “In life a lot depends on me” and “How I live is the result of my actions”. *For the lower class:* “What a nasty country I live in” and “All my troubles are because I live in this country”. *For the upper class:* “Thanks God and everyone around, I did well!”

For the middle class: “No one will lead us astray”. *For the lower class:* “We do not care where to go.” *For the upper class:* “Thanks goodness everyone is so rich around me”.

MIDDLE CLASS IN UKRAINE: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Discussing the features of the middle class in Ukraine, the participants briefly outlined its sociodemographic characteristics. The social structure of Ukrainian middle class and various social and professional groups belonging to it were considered in more detail.

1. Age, gender, marital status. Most participants of the discussion agreed that middle class representatives are of different ages – from 25-28 years old (considering the period of study in a higher or vocational educational institution) up until the retirement age. According to them, at its “core” are the people of the most active working age – 30-40 or 35-45 year-olds.

However, the opinion was expressed that belonging to the middle class has nothing to do with age as, *firstly*, there is an inherited “belongingness” (children from middle-class families belong to the same class); *secondly*, after the enrolment in higher educational institutions, a person “automatically” joins the middle class. Similarly, different views were expressed regarding the retirement age: when some of the respondents insisted that today’s pensioners do not belong to the middle class due to their tiny income (pension); others rejected this approach, arguing that even with tiny income, a person from the middle class preserves his educational and cultural level, and respective life experience so after retirement, he is still a representative of the middle class.

Gender, according to most participants, is irrelevant to class: both men and women belong to the middle class “in equal shares” (*Odesa*), or such “belongingness” is not individual but rather group or family-related (*Lviv-2*). When describing Ukrainian and European middle class, most focus group participants spoke of families rather than individuals.

Kyiv-1

“Their [middle-class] age begins at 25 years old up until the retirement age”.

“If we take pensioners who have small pensions... Pensioners have connections, education, family but pensions are at the level of the poor”.

“I do not think pensioners are lower class. Just lower middle”.

“Pensioners cannot belong to the lower class! Pensioners have degrees, almost all of them!”

Odesa

“From the age of 25 – because a person has obtained an education, profession, and is already working – and up to the retirement age, if a person is able to work and is employed”.

“After the retirement the majority are forced to linger out one’s days”.

Kyiv-2

“I think it is not connected to age. For as people are growing older, they immediately draw children into this system, and they also become second-generation middle class”.

“A person enrolled in a university automatically becomes middle class — he cannot be identified with lower class, can he? However... he is not earning anything yet but he stands a good chance to gain a foothold in the middle class as he is already in the right environment”.

2. Number and percentage of the middle class in the population. The focus groups did not show a clear understanding of what percentage of the total population the middle class in Ukrainian society represents. The estimates mainly ranged from 20-30% to 40-50% of the country’s population. In the Kharkiv group, the participants (based on the situation in their city) named higher figures — up to 70%. Approximately one third of the participants allocated a smaller percentage (10-15%) to the middle class. However, almost all focus groups expressed confidence that the middle class should comprise the majority in the society — above 60% (similar to Europe).

3. Geography of the middle class. According to the participants, the Ukrainian middle class is concentrated mostly in the capital city, million-plus cities and large regional centres with more opportunities and jobs. The Kharkiv group also distinguished Eastern and Central Ukraine, indicating higher — compared to other regions — level of urbanisation.

The middle class is vastly under-represented in rural areas, where only some successful farmers, and sometimes small business owners, heads of public institutions (for example, schools) and local government can be identified as middle class. Also, the Lviv groups noted that in European countries, farmers are a formed and established part of the middle class.

Kyiv-2

“Where there is work, there is middle class...”.

“First of all, it is tied down to work and making money”.

Kharkiv

“[In big cities] there are more opportunities. Urbanisation, modern standard of living”.

Kyiv-1

“[In rural areas] — the poor”.

“Only farmers who invested in land are on the go. That is it”.

Lviv-2

“Once I was travelling in Austria. So I was driving through the Austrian countryside. There is simply no rural poverty. Two or three storeys, one or two BMW or Mercedes next to every house — and it is like that for dozens of kilometres. It is really impressive”.

4. Social structure of the middle class. Social and professional groups that meet the basic identification criteria of the middle class were also discussed. They involved those having higher or vocational education and/or highly qualified, mostly white-collar workers or skilled workers (ideally) with a level of income corresponding to their qualification. Regardless of their educational level and qualifications, small and medium business owners as well as rentiers were also considered middle class.

Thus, according to focus groups, the middle class comprises the following:

- both employees, who make up its majority (“an employee, in 95% of cases”, *Kyiv-1*) and owners and employers;
- various professional groups employed in both public and private sectors;
- military personnel (“from a major to a lieutenant colonel and higher”, *Lviv-1*);
- self-employed, freelancers and creative professionals as well as the people who have capital and live off dividend income (rentiers).

Three questions provoked a debate among the focus group participants. *Firstly*, they once again touched upon the problem of identifying pensioners with the middle class, which had been discussed before. *Secondly*, the issue of identifying teachers, doctors and some other professional groups (in particular, culture professionals) with the middle class was debated.

On the one hand, in two of the six focus groups, the participants named teachers and doctors among the first associations with “middle class in Ukraine”; in other groups, teachers and doctors were consistently referred to as professional communities, which *by definition* should belong to the middle class based on social significance of their profession and work, “Teachers, doctors – they are saving us, the state and society”.



On the other hand, these professions in Ukraine mostly do not meet the criterion for identification with the middle class such as the level of income. Most teachers and doctors in Ukraine work in public institutions where the wages are very low. According to the focus group participants, this salary corresponds

to the income of the lower class. Therefore, in order to earn more, teachers and doctors have to either work 1.5-2 times more, or have side jobs or private tuition (often unofficially).

Kyiv-1

“Why do doctors combine jobs? They will not survive on one salary, on two salaries — they will make it somehow, and on three — they will simply break down”.

Odesa

“Teachers — they have simply been thrown below the poverty line. They have been given such a wage that they have to take bribes. When they should be in the middle class”.

Lviv-2

“They have a small official wage, and those teachers and doctors — [earn with] tutoring and by performing operations. They make it to the middle class but officially — they are the lower class”.

Generally, in these discussions, the focus group participants reached a conclusion that in Ukraine, social significance of the profession does not correspond to official wages — and this situation should be changed. This also applies to pensioners since they “have already worked for the state”.

Kyiv-2

“Ideally, people who bring great benefit to society belong to the middle class”.

Kyiv-1

“For they raise the spiritual value of the nation. For, in addition to income, people also have other values, they bear the spiritual component for the country”.

“Education, healthcare, jurisprudence — this is a backbone which holds the society together”.

Kharkiv

“Intellectuals should be in the middle class because they are educated, because they are well-bred, because they work”.

“I think that state workers should have the same wage as civil servants. State workers — they have all the necessary qualities to be middle class but their income... The state does not spend much on their wages”.

“Pensioners are the people who have already worked for the state — and now the state should adequately provide for them”.

Thirdly, the problem of identifying the employees of the service industry and skilled workers with the middle class were discussed, as they tend to have no higher or vocational education. Most respondents agree that the level of income remains the main criterion and consider the employees of the service industry and skilled workers (who are in high demand in labour market and whose income is higher than that of many professionals with higher education e.g., teachers and doctors) middle class.

Lviv-1

“I think the middle class consists of professionals. It is the service industry. They are the people who can work with their hands. They make money”.

“If a profession is in demand, and this person is in demand and has enough offers, he is middle class”.

“A lawyer was prestigious, now a car mechanic is prestigious. It changes”.

“If a person... a professional — for example, a plumber but he is professional, he should be middle class”.

Lviv-2

“Yes, skilled — even the service industry... even the custom services — why cannot they be middle class?”

Kyiv-1

“Take employees of automobile repair shops — they are all professionals, and they all belong to the middle class. Photocopier or IT engineers — they make good money”.



To sum up, when discussing the social structure of the middle class, the focus group participants included rather diverse social and professional groups into it, judging them mainly by the level of income. However, it often contradicts the identification with the middle class based on another criterion – i.e. belonging to professions that require high level of education and/or qualification. As a result, the boundaries of the middle class remained rather vague. However, it can be argued that the focus group

participants identified themselves as middle class based on fairly similar characteristics but not on their lifestyle – a topic which was omitted from the discussion.

LIVING CONDITIONS (FINANCIAL SITUATION) OF UKRAINIAN MIDDLE CLASS

The focus group participants described the living conditions of the middle class from several perspectives – based on their own living conditions, and describing proper, in their opinion, living conditions of the middle class in general, and the desired conditions for themselves. Among the components of living conditions were, first of all, housing, car, home appliances, the sources and level of income (adequate level of spending on food, goods and services, education, recreation, leisure, savings, etc).

1. Material wellbeing. As noted in the first part of the study, material wellbeing is one of the criteria for belonging to the middle class and involves a rather standard set: a flat – a car – a *dacha*. According to the participants, a typical representative of the middle class, should ideally have a rather spacious flat (separate room for each family member) in central part of the city or in a neighbourhood with good transport connections, a modern car worth over \$20 000 (such brands as Hyundai, Ford, Skoda, Volkswagen), and preferably a *dacha* not far from the city (within 50 km) – a small house with a small plot, “to be able to put a fireplace and a small swimming pool – to rest, not to cultivate” (*Kharkiv*). In the Lviv groups, the respondents preferred to have a house in the suburbs; in the Kyiv and Kharkiv groups – a three-bedroom flat.

Kyiv-2

“Accommodation should be where you work. Where you want it rather not where you got it”.

“A three-bedroom flat somewhere in the centre, in a prestigious neighbourhood, in a new building... What are you laughing at?”

Odesa

“Each family member should have a room, I mean children. Preferably to have a *dacha* – for example, from parents – and a car”.

Kharkiv

“A three-bedroom flat, a separate room for each family member, renovated...”.

“If it is a flat, there should be *dacha*, and if not a flat, then a nice cottage”.

Lviv-2

“Ideally, it should be a country house... [It may be a long commute] but a family would live in a big house with a yard, there is a swimming pool there, some kind of a garden, etc.”

However, based on the statements of most respondents, their real living conditions as well as their cars are somewhat far from perfect. Only a small number of participants own a house or a comfortable flat in new developments. Most of them live in two or three-bedroom flats obtained either in Soviet times

or from parents, and drive used cars, “[Our] middle class has a place to live and something to drive” (*Kyiv-I*). Most respondents cannot afford to buy a new car, and, especially, a new flat.

Odesa

“The houses and flats of the middle class were mostly obtained back in Soviet times”.

“These were flats received from government agencies in Soviet times”.

“Today the middle class cannot afford to buy a flat”.

“They can only inherit a place”.

The participants of the discussion stressed the importance of formal property rights or home ownership, *firstly*, as a key to psychological comfort – “My home is my castle” (*Kharkiv*) – confidence and stability, and, *secondly*, as an asset, a way to invest and save money, and in case of lease – a source of additional income.

However, two groups debated whether it is reasonable to own both principal residence and *dacha*. There was an opinion that it is better to be financially capable of choosing the place they wish to rent and, especially, a country house because it opens the door to the freedom of movement and gives an option to choose a different holiday destination each time. However, the predominant opinion was: “If I am middle class, I should own it all” (*Kyiv-I*).



Accommodation should be (and usually is) equipped with modern home appliances – a fridge, a washing

machine, a dishwasher, a microwave, a TV, and definitely a computer. The respondents were not particularly concerned about the brands of home appliances, “They just should be there – that is what important” (*Kyiv-I*).

2. Income and expenses. According to the participants, the main source of income of the middle class is their salary, which corresponds to the fact that most of its representatives are employees. However, as it was phrased in one of the groups and conveyed in all groups: “Nobody has ever lived off a salary here” (*Lviv-I*). Usually, there are also “side jobs”, “relatives living in the countryside” (the source of food, which is also organic), sometimes deposit earnings, rental income, etc. In most cases, income from “side jobs” is shadow.

Social benefits, exemptions, etc., do not play a significant role in family budget of respondents. In general, social benefits are associated either with lower class or with the fact “that practically, there aren’t any benefits”. It should be noted that there had been calls “to seek social help”, and some of the respondents already enjoyed certain privileges, and believed that “if you have connections, you can get a lot of privileges”.

Kyiv-2

“Salary, for some — business. Investment, deposit interest”.

“A side job in addition to a salary. There have to be side jobs. To live off the salary only is a punishment”.

“However, a salary is the main source of income”.

“...I am always happy to use benefits. I pay smaller flat tax, I have a subsidy as a war veteran”.

“A free holiday for children”.

“50% [of the payment for services] in hospitals for a civil servant or an official”.

“Dividends”.

Kyiv-1

“Business income. If this is trade, there are options — to sell something directly...”.

“We also have a lot of shoddy work. Moonlighting”.

Odesa

“Speaking of doctors and teachers, 70% is additional income”.

Kharkiv

“It can be a side job, such as trade. You browse the Internet, buy something, resell something...”.

“Some kind of shadow side jobs... Home service”.

Lviv-1

“Well, I have a small savings account. However, you cannot live off that interest. It is just to try...”.

“[Not us but] officials have those benefits, and they know how to use them”.

According to them, the average income per each family member is as follows: in Lviv and Odesa UAH 2000-3000, sometimes up to UAH 4000; in Kyiv and Kharkiv UAH 3000-5000. A “desired income” should be approximately two times

higher: in Lviv and Odesa “at least UAH 5000, and above”, in Kyiv and Kharkiv UAH 7000-10 000. “The perfect income” for everyone is UAH 12 000 per family member, which at that time was equal to \$1000.

Lviv-1

“We have once figured — about five hundred dollars per person. Yes, five hundred dollars for a person to feel OK”.

“Then a person would feel good”.

Kharkiv

“Ideally, a thousand dollars, probably not less”.

“Not to do side jobs. Not to rely on relatives...”.

“Not to spend your free time on side jobs, first of all. Secondly, to have enough not only for everyday life... but also to save for something more... serious. I would spend more time with family. So, let us say, I would have a job with a certain schedule and regime, and the rest of the time I would dedicate to my family — my kid, his upbringing...”.

A lion’s share of family budget (approximately 80%) is spent on current needs – food, public utilities, clothes, education, loan payments, etc. The respondents usually try to save around 10% of their income for a holiday, and around the same amount they save additionally.

3. Food. According to the respondents, middle-class families have more opportunities to ensure a healthy and balanced diet than representatives of the lower class. They can afford better quality and more diverse food – meat, fish and seafood, fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs; they can buy organic food rather than convenience food. Representatives of the middle class eat out more often and order take-away from restaurants.

However, most respondents are not satisfied with food quality; those who say that they grow food at *dachas* would like to be able to buy more organic products, without preservatives and GMO, etc. Usually, they are financially capable of purchasing such products but there is no food available. The Lviv groups mentioned the lack of money for more diverse and high-quality products.

In general, to improve diet, the respondents lack high-quality food, money, and time.

Most respondents have daily lunch at fast food restaurants; the rest prefer homemade food that they take to work. The price of a business lunch ranges from UAH 25-30 in Lviv to UAH 50-60 in Kyiv. Odesa and Kharkiv residents usually take homemade food to work, and if they eat out, they spend around UAH 30-50 on lunch.

Respondents have different attitudes to going to restaurants in the evening and visit them with different frequency – usually once every two or three months, with an average bill from UAH 130 in Lviv to UAH 400 per person in Kyiv. For most respondents, eating out is neither an ordinary, everyday thing nor a usual way to get away from household chores related to cooking at home. Going to a restaurant is associated with “going out into the world”, a sort of celebration.

Lviv-1

“For holidays — we get together, go to a restaurant and order different salads, something like that — some desserts... If I do not want something, I will move it away but we will be at a nice place. We eat steaks, some salads with Parmesan cheese. It is expensive but we can afford it”.

Kharkiv

“It costs two or three hundred *hryvnias* per person! I have no complaints — I just do not understand why go there — to a restaurant”.

“I go there if there is an event or a special occasion. However, going for a bite — I do not find it necessary”.

“When there is a bag of money, and you go there to show off — then you go out to dinner with someone”.

4. Clothing and appearance. There were opinions that a representative of the middle class stands out with appearance, clothes, shoes, watch, etc. – however, this applied to the times “when there were no Chinese replicas or counterfeits” (Kyiv-2); now only the upper class stands out with accessories and clothes since these things are really expensive and differ from popular garments. As to the middle class, most respondents tend to believe that its representative is well-groomed rather than well-dressed – he looks good, you can see that he has time and money “to look after himself”.

“His does not dress glamorously but he is well-groomed. His clothes are neat, clean, and ironed. He wears ordinary clothes, not Armani or Gucci, of course. His clothes is from the seventh kilometre” (Odesa).⁵

5. Savings. Most respondents believe that savings is one of the criteria of belonging to the middle class. Savings provide the ability to spend money wisely and plan big purchases as well as give the sense of comfort and confidence – “You sleep well”, “It is not like that any more when something happens, you go looking for money” (Lviv-1); “I feel calmer when there is money saved” (Kyiv-2).

⁵ The seventh kilometre is a large market near Odesa that sells a variety of goods (including those smuggled to Ukraine) – Ed.

As noted above, a representative of the middle class can save approximately 10% of income (higher percentage was rarely named). Savings are usually kept in cash (including hard currency), sometimes – in jewellery, securities, and on savings accounts. If a significant amount is saved, buying property is preferred. It was discussed that older people keep their savings at home, and young people – in banks.

Most savings intended to meet the material needs (accommodation, *dacha*, renovation, etc.), some – non-material (children's education, holidays, travel, recreation, presents for family and friends) as well as for "just in case", "for a rainy day". It was noted that money is often saved irregularly, the amount of savings is not constant, and is often spent on small things or emergency purchases.

According to most of the respondents, in case of the loss of income sources, there should be enough savings, for 3-6 months for the family to live without reducing the standard of living; some groups insisted on a period of six months to a year – if to economize.

Kyiv-1

"A flat, a car".

"Education, travel".

"Mostly material values. Less – spiritual".

"I am just saving, and when there is a sum, you can think of something".

Lviv-1

"Something primary, current – recreation".

"For me, it is for health, for example, of the kid – if, God forbid, something happens. We had an operation...".

"For health, yes. Unexpected circumstances...".

"For renovation, future education for children, for tutors...".

"I have the so-called 'untouchable savings' – just in case, anything can happen. It can be a hospital... God forbid...".

"...For me, it was like this – when children were in school, I was saving. I assumed you would have to pay for education. I was saving for their education. After they graduated, I have been saving – I want to have home renovation. However, I also have the 'untouchable savings' for a rainy day".

"It depends on the income – sometimes I make two or three thousand *hryvnias* a month and save nothing".

6. Overall financial situation. Not surprisingly, most participants of the discussions are not happy with their current financial situation. They would like to spend less on food and utility bills and have more money for leisure, recreation, travelling, entertainment, a healthier and more varied diet, eating out, ordering take-away from restaurants, and personal care.

Kyiv-1

“I need a car, my salary was reduced. You go there and devote yourself 100% but earn less than you used to... I do not have enough for charity, I do not have enough money to spend on health...”.

“I would like to be able to afford everything...”.

Odesa

“[If there were more money], we would eat healthier food. Healthy and varied”.

“A different holiday — not on the beach with dirty sand but to take a beach chair, an umbrella...”.

“Wellness... We would take care of our health more”.

“On appearance. To visit the hairdresser more often”.

Kharkiv

“Get a more prestigious car”.

“Take the whole family to Greece...”.

Summarising the above, one can conclude that living conditions of the middle class in Ukraine are much better than that of the lower class. But this only means that the middle class is not on the brink of survival, as the lower class is. It has jobs, can provide some level of comfort, food, etc. to their families, and can afford to make savings. However, ownership of a new comfortable home — an important criterion of the middle class, and a vital necessity for a family — yet remains largely inaccessible to many. Most respondents indicated that their home was either inherited or purchased by their parents.



MIDDLE CLASS IN UKRAINE: LIFESTYLE

Based on what the participants of the discussions said, life of the middle class in Ukraine is primarily filled with work and family. Most of their free time, including holidays, the respondents spend with family. The discussion of the issue of free time showed that women are likely to have much more household chores than men. When describing the lifestyle of the middle class, the respondents touched upon its professional and geographic mobility, insurance and loan behaviour, and a sense of confidence in the future, in particular concerning the prospects for old age support.

1. Work, professional activities, and situation on the labour market

Working day and free time. Duration of the working day of most respondents is usually 8 hours; some work longer hours or shifts. During the working week, free time is usually spent on household chores, children, watching TV, and using computer. Participants of the discussions noted that in recent weeks, more and more time was spent on watching the news from the area of the Counter-Terrorist Operation.⁶

Summing up what the respondents said about how they spend their free time during the working week, it proves that despite formal gender equality (“it does not apply to the middle class”), women, unlike men, are overloaded with housework. The statements show that cooking, housekeeping, cleaning, etc. are a woman’s “second job”. Also, none of the focus group participants ever had a housekeeper; there were only two examples of hiring a nanny for childcare – still only for a short period.

Kyiv-1

“On the way from work – shopping. The rest is bedtime routine with my family...”

“When a computer appeared, we have begun to spend to much time on it”.

“Cleaning, cooking – all of this takes time. I do not have a housekeeper...”

Lviv-1

“I am into education – self-education, and engaging with my child”.

“Following the news has taken a lot of time recently. It is a known fact that people spend hours watching what is happening there”.

“Then women cry at night...”

“Well, like every woman – firstly, the household, then sometime for yourself, and then you also watch the news...”

Odesa

“I cook and then watch TV”.

“I do homework with my kid, then feed my husband, feed my cat, and go to bed”.

⁶ The Counter-Terrorist Operation began on 13 April 2014; the focus groups were conducted in May-June 2014.

Kharkiv

“[After work] we start another work. I do not mean work — I mean cooking, cleaning and so on...”

“I have to take one kid out, the other one — to dancing, and it is like this all the time...”

“Every day is planned... with some duties — today I am taking the kid to practice, tomorrow I am going there myself...”

“Go home to catch up on sleep because we have night shifts”.

On weekends, the respondents occasionally visit family, meet friends, and also spend time on hobbies, walks, and reading. Preference for passive leisure activities (“to catch up on sleep”) strikes the eye. Only a small number of participants prefer active time spending, i.e. sports, wellness, etc.

Odesa

“You can go to the seaside or to the theatre, go out somewhere...”

“In summer, usually to the beach. In winter, you can go to the seaside, or to the city centre for a walk”.

“In winter, if it is cold, it is better to visit someone...”

“On weekends, the most important thing is to catch up with sleep”.

Kharkiv

“Friday is my free day, I can spend it on some kind of force majeure or chores, family, or with friends...”

“You can go to the theatre or to the movies”.

“In winter, more at home on the couch — I want to go into hibernation like a bear”.

Kyiv-1

“Not work! Outdoors. Church”.

“Hunting, fishing”.

“Meeting friends”.

“Walking, reading”.

Kyiv-2

“I read. You can play some sports. In winter, you can go bowling, in summer — go outdoors. After work, I would rather watch the news on TV”.

“I read, educate myself, watch documentaries, and exercise. At least 2-3 hours a day I walk around the city. On weekends, I travel to other cities with my friends”.

Professional activities and professional mobility. Most participants of the discussion are happy with their professional activities, if not to take into account the wages. In their work, the respondents mostly appreciate the availability of free time, the ability to plan working hours independently, and flexible working schedule. The opportunity to interact with people from the upper class was also mentioned. Most rarely, the respondents alluded to the social significance of their profession (a colonel, *Lviv-2*).

Low salary that corresponds neither to the status nor to the social significance of work was among the main causes of respondents' dissatisfaction with their professional activities.

Lviv-2

"What I like is rather the opportunity to interact with people from upper class. That is, to have something to aspire after and have some principles..."

"I am connected to border [guards] so there is my contribution to the protection of the border and statehood..."

"The salary does not match the workload and the fact that doctors should continually... improve. That is, training, internships — you have to invest in all this, and if you do not earn much, you cannot afford it..."

Only about half of focus group participants work in the area indicated in their diploma. The rest changed their profession, sometimes more than once. It should be noted that a change in profession was not accompanied by getting another degree — the respondents believe that you do not need a degree to be employed (any diploma of higher education is enough) as much as you need work experience and qualifications. Most of the respondents changed occupation and/or profession to become entrepreneurs.

Kharkiv

"So I have a degree in law. At the place I worked in this area, I was not happy with the salary... with anything. So I went into business — I sell flowers..."

"I have a degree in telecommunications engineering; I am an entrepreneur".

"For example, I have started as a primary school teacher, and now I am already a university lecturer".

Odesa

"My first degree was an emergency room doctor, medical emergencies. I had worked there for six years, and I said that I would tear my diploma to pieces and leave. I left for a company involved in pharmaceutical business, I was a manager and built a career very quickly. I got to know what big money was, I earned for everything I wanted, I have bought a car and a flat, travelled halfway around the world, and then nostalgia for a white coat began. I wanted to come back. It took me a year to change my speciality. Now I'm back".

"I have a degree in economy. I worked as an economist, and then I went into trade and already knew what to do".

Lviv-1

“I have gone down a bit. I have a degree in architecture, and currently I work as a designer”.

Usually, those who are dissatisfied with their professional activities are willing to change their profession, sometimes by investing their money in getting another degree. However, most refuse to pay for education or training since there is a risk that the obtained degree will not be in demand, and the money will be lost.

Some of those dissatisfied do not intend to change it because, *firstly*, the current period is unfavourable to any changes, especially to start your own business, and, *secondly*, it often does not make sense to change a profession as any work is equally low-paid.

Kyiv-1

“[Risk] is when you have an occupation and invest in training, get another degree — it does not mean that you will work in the new area”.

“If you feel confident in your profession, you can develop there. If not, you learn something new”.

Kyiv-2

“To change your professional activities completely. I enjoy working with children, and I am a manager, in economics. I am even willing to get another degree to do this. I feel my husband’s support, and I can get another degree”.

“Have nothing to change it for”.

“Jumping out of the frying pan into the fire”.

“...Here, the fear that you will lose everything dominates. Stability is important to him, an area where he is an expert”.

“I feel, in our country, only the idiots are involved in business now. You have to bribe everyone, there are no rules”.

Most respondents said that they were continuously improving their qualifications at respective trainings, and preferred those paid by employers. The exception are foreign language courses – a substantial number of the focus group participants have either completed such courses or are currently enrolled on them.

Discussing the issue of changes necessary to enjoy professional activities, the participants went beyond personal preferences and touched upon more general problems. It should be noted that participants of the discussion who are employees consider it necessary to provide stable wages first – “the laws should be changed

so that the wages will be stable” (*Odesa*), and entrepreneurs – to curb corruption, “we want to be left alone, less bribery and corruption” (*Kyiv-1*). However, oddly enough, the participants are even willing to pay a “corruption tax” but defined and fixed. It seems that unforeseen changes in the rules of the game hinder the entrepreneurship the most:

“To have stability. Every month, the very same person comes expecting a fixed amount of money rather than 40 people appearing every day and wanting something”.

Only a small number of participants feel confident on the labour market, and not always because of their qualifications and demand in their profession but on the contrary – because “they are willing to do any work” (*Lviv-1*). It was denied that in the public sector employees felt more confident than in the private sector since “at least they get something every month”, and the level of social security is higher.

Lviv-2

“... There can be any reorganisation which always comes from the top so in healthcare adjusting usually goes one way... One day we are letting family physicians and paediatricians go, another day subspecialists are not needed at all, everyone treats everything, so we have no confidence in the future”.

The idea of “a good job”. Most participants of the discussion named stability and “good salary” as key factors of “a good job”. The requirements for the job “to be interesting”, “to enjoy the job” rank second. Among other requirements were the prospects for professional and career growth; “adequate management”; good team; and comfortable office not far from home. It should be noted that the quality of work – it should be interesting, and one should enjoy it – was often ranked first among other requirements.

Kyiv-1

“Good salary. Social security”.

“Enjoying your work”.

“A stable salary. The opportunity to grow”.

“A good work schedule. To be able to enjoy it”.

“You like it. You go there happily”.

Odesa

“Interesting work and to be paid”.

“Pleasure and income”.

“Good relations in a team”.

Kharkiv

“When you enjoy your work, you know? For me, it depends on a salary, again. Let us say, there are three criteria, which I identify for a good job – a fixed, reasonable work schedule, yes, and flexible hours. A decent salary, respectively. And to enjoy it”.

“When you are not looking at the clock – for it to be over, so you can go home...”.

“For me, location is also important. I would not really like to pass through the entire city to get to work”.

“Social circle, a team”.

Geographic mobility. Although representatives of Ukrainian middle class want to have “a good job”, they cannot change a place of residence. The participants were much less willing to change location than to change jobs or an occupation. In cases when a focus group participant agreed to move – if provided with a better job, higher salary, comfortable accommodation, etc. – they mentioned Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Donetsk, Poltava, and Truskavets as potential towns for relocation.

The most interesting fact is that geographic mobility of the middle class was denied primarily on the basis that the middle class, unlike the lower class, is “city-forming”, it is tied to a certain place, a certain job – and that is one of its defining features. Other respondents interpreted low mobility of the middle class as a mental feature – attachment to family circle is greater than, for example, in Europe; yet others appeal to local patriotism, love for their hometown, etc. Odesa residents, among whom only one participant expressed verbal willingness to move to another city, used these arguments most often. However, there is a more pragmatic explanation: a fear of losing “social capital” accumulated in their hometown – connections.

However, along with reluctance to change the place of residence within Ukraine, most respondents indicated willingness to emigrate.

Kyiv-1

“More money, better job. No, if to leave Kyiv, only for better conditions. I will tell you what – transport, social sector will be worse there...”.

“I would go to Western Ukraine – and open a hotel there. If the wages were higher there. To Truskavets”.

“If in Europe, there is stability, confidence in the future, employment package. Even the Warsaw Pact countries, Czech Republic – people I know are buying flats there, not here, they no longer invest in real estate here”.

Kyiv-2

“For example, the lower class comes to Kyiv because the middle class has already settled, they are not looking for anything better ‘where the grass is always greener’”.

“The middle class is city-forming, mobility is not that typical for them... This is a city-forming structure of a normal society, tied to a place and work”.

“I would like to move abroad but I have some sort of fear that I will not make it. The thing is that the entire family has to move, and the language barrier”.

Lviv-1

“I think we have a completely different perception than Europeans. We are more tied to the family — mum, dad, sister — how can you leave your parents and go?”

“In Ukraine — no. Me — only abroad, I do not dream of it but will probably try. What should I do? In the next twenty years it may get worse here. We should think about it. Everyone should”.

“Yes, this is something to think about...”.

“Where do your bad thoughts about our country come from? Everything will be OK in our country, it will be steady. Believe me”.

“It will be steadily bad here”.

“No. Everything will be OK here, we should live in our home country — Ukraine, and not go anywhere”.

Odesa

“The city keeps me, the sea... We just love our city, that is all”.

“Community. I can solve any issue here over the phone in 15 minutes. Any — my car broke down, I called a friend, he came and pulled me out. It will take many years to get that many friends in another city... Any gas, accommodation, or legal issue — any — I make a call and it is solved. What would I do in another city?”

In general, it seems that most representatives of the middle class are tied to the place of residence, to what they have accumulated and acquired (property, connections, career); even if they are not happy with their life or professional activities, they do not tend to risk, or spend time and money for possible changes for the better — trying to start a new business, get another degree, a new profession, find another job, move to another region, etc.

2. Recreation: holidays

Most participants of the discussion are given a paid leave. Expenses on holidays are approximately 10% of the annual income, sometimes more; although they “would like more — 20%”, or “same 10% but for the income to be higher”. Usually, people are satisfied with their holidays over the last 2-3 years although they felt a lack of money, “I would like to be able to afford more — like eating out...” (*Kyiv-1*). The respondents would like to afford “ocean sailing”, “sea fishing”, and skiing but they cannot.

The participants mostly spent their summer holidays near the sea, primarily in Crimea (based on the statements, almost all the respondents visited the peninsula) as well as at inexpensive resorts in Bulgaria, Egypt, and Turkey. For a winter holiday, they preferred the Carpathians. In general, Lviv and Kamyanets-Podilskyi are the most popular destinations in Ukraine.

Among the countries visited by the focus group participants (including while on holiday), there is Austria, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, China, Poland, Hungary, Finland, France, Czech Republic, and Sweden. Most respondents are excited about trips abroad, perceive them as a special occasion, and try to see as much as possible, preferring guided tours, i.e. active recreation. At resorts, however, passive recreation is preferred, which they explain as a rest not only from work but also, it seems, from interaction with a limited circle of colleagues.

There are several key requirements for a “proper” holiday: a change of scene, sufficient amount of money, the ability to be with the entire family, and “forget about work”, “to be left alone”. The statements of female participants of the discussion are significant and notable, confirming the above observation about them being busy with housework – on holiday, they dream not to “slave over a hot stove”, cook, or wash up but “to get away from housework”.

Kyiv-1

“To be left alone...”.

“To be able to afford anything, not to live on a shoestring. Not to think of anything, just relax...”.

“To be left alone. If it is all-inclusive, you will basically have enough of everything. You do not have to worry whether you will eat tomorrow...”.

Kyiv-2

“Good food is a must”.

“To see something interesting and new, some buildings. Sights of a new country”.

“Diving and hunting”.

Lviv-1

“A change of scene”.

“To have nothing to do with cooking”.

“To be all together... There should be comfort”.

Odesa

“To change the scene...”.

“Not to be disturbed with work, then it will be a proper holiday. Switch off the phone and get enough sleep. Sunbathe at the seaside. A break from everyday life and work”.

“Not to do the washing up!”

“By the way, this is the most important thing...”.

“Visit local sights”.

Kharkiv

“To be interesting. To forget about work”.

“There should be no kitchen, there should be no cooking. There is catering. Yes. So, that I do not slave over a hot stove on holiday”.

Desired holiday. Most participants of the discussion think that it would be best to take a holiday twice a year – two weeks in winter and two weeks in summer, or three times a year – for 10 days. According to the respondents, this schedule and the “work – holiday” order, would allow not to get tired of a very long period of either work or holidays. If a holiday could be taken several times a year, the respondents could switch between active and passive recreation. The most desired holiday is travelling, both within Ukraine and to other countries.

Kyiv-1

“One holiday – to relax, the other – to educational”.

“One – to lie on the beach, the other – to go skiing”.

Kyiv-2

“Ideally, to a different country every year. I want to go everywhere. Once a year – to Western Ukraine, and twice – abroad”.

Lviv-1

“To relax, and then also to visit something...”.

“The way he wants...”.

Lviv-2

“Once – in Europe, once – in the Carpathians...”.

“I think that the middle class... goes to the seaside in summer, and in winter they go skiing somewhere in the Alps”.

Odesa

“To travel abroad more often. For travelling — there is a trend to compare the incomparable, get new experience”.

“I would like to have time off not in these long cycles of months but twice a year for two weeks, or even better — three times for 10 days”.

“10 days in each quarter — it would be perfect. I am not that tired to relax for the entire month”.

“I am also getting tired of a one-month holiday...”.

3. Insurance and loan behaviour

Insurance. The focus group participants showed either “a reserved” or openly negative attitude towards insurance companies. Only some respondents said that they had insurance policies (in addition to mandatory insurance): property insurance, sometimes — health insurance, especially for children.

Such attitude towards insurance companies is based, *firstly*, on the general sense of instability in the countries, and thus — instability of any institution, both public and private; and, *secondly*, on the lack of confidence in insurance companies, caused by both their inappropriate practices (including failure to comply with the laws) and the lack of government control over these activities. Usually, the respondents spoke based on their own experience with insurers or the experience of their family or friends.

However, despite positive examples of getting partial payments on health, property (flat) and vehicle insurance policies, the respondents expressed strong dissatisfaction with insurance practices in Ukraine: primarily, the paper chase upon the occurrence of an insured event and non-payment of the full amount of the insurance compensation as stated in the policy; long lists of force majeure circumstances and their ambiguous interpretation; direct denial by companies to pay and recommendations for the insured person to go to court; and violation of the law which regulates the activities of insurance companies.

Kyiv-1

“In our country, this system is unreliable... They may pay but how much stress this is!”

“It is difficult to prove, it is difficult to get payments in due time... They will not pay the cost of a flat”.

“I had a case with the cost of repairs so they said straight away — go to court”.

Kyiv-2

“Just not in our country. In general, the insurance cover is good...”.

“The thing is when you buy an insurance, the company that insures you should also be insured”.

“An insurance company may fall apart — and you will lose all the money. In our country, there is no stability”.

Lviv-1

“That is why we do not buy insurance — we do not trust the insurance company...”.

“When there is a car accident, you have to fight for insurance... To hire lawyers to get that insurance cover...”.

Odesa

“Negative [attitude]. Because it is always force majeure for them. They include everything [there]... they swindled us so many times”.

“We take out health, vehicle, and home insurance but get nothing in return. Later they deny [insurance claims]”.

Kharkiv

“Insurance mechanisms do not work. A good idea but it is all... problematic right now...”.

“I have one car insurance ...They calculated the accident settlement of 11 000 *hryvnias*, paid 6000. I started arguing — but it was useless...”.

“Well, you can prove it but in order to prove it, you have to spent so much time and effort...”.

It should be noted that the respondents’ negative experience causes the lack of confidence in their attitude towards the prospects of introducing mandatory health insurance, which has been discussed in Ukraine in recent years. However, the respondents expressed understanding of the need, in particular, of medical and pension reforms but they believed that the reform of the insurance system was necessary. This was demonstrated in the dialogue, which took place in the Odesa focus group.

– ***Why do you disapprove the introduction of mandatory health insurance?***

– *Because they never fulfil their obligations.*

– *And we cannot make them meet the terms.*

– ***What is missing? Persistence?***

– *There is the lack of political will of the state leadership. I think that without the pension and healthcare reform, and insurance [reform], we have no future as a middle-aged generation.*

Loan behaviour, attitude towards banks. Loan behaviour and keeping money on savings accounts depend primarily on the public attitude to banking institutions, which, in turn, is derived from public assessment of the government's ability to set and comply with the rules of the game in financial markets. The focus group respondents rated this ability of the government as fairly low so their attitude towards loans and deposits is generally distrustful. This was clearly demonstrated by statements of the participants in the Lviv group.

[Our attitude towards banks] – same as to the state. – Negative. – Slightly suspicious. – I did not even put money on a savings account. You can put it, and then you cannot take them back” (Lviv-1).

Nearly one in two respondents had an experience of taking and paying out loans, including big ones (to buy a car or a flat). The attitude towards loans is controversial, and towards big long-term loans (for example, for buying property) – mostly negative (“God forbid I take a mortgage loan in our country”, *Kyiv-1*). Although several participants in one Kyiv group had taken out loans to buy cars and flats – and were satisfied.

According to the respondents, representatives of the middle class – given their level of income – need loans, including big ones to purchase property, develop their business, etc. However, among the hindering factors are, *firstly*, general instability in the country, which causes a sense of instability of one's status (solvency), and instability of the banking institutions; *secondly*, bank lending practices – high interest rates, hidden charges (insurance, loan servicing, etc.), unilateral increase in interest rates, banks taking a hard line in case of sudden exchange rate shocks, etc.

As a result, the participants expressed a generally positive attitude towards small consumer loans (indeed, in one of the Lviv groups, most participants take loans and believe that they pay off, in particular due to rising prices in consumer markets) but in most cases, they concluded that “it is better not to take” loans.

Lviv-1

“[Loans] – this is normal. My friends – there are mostly young people present here, like my sons – I would like them to move out if they had such an opportunity, if they could even rent that accommodation with their salary – and something to be left – or even take out this loan, or rent, to be free, you know? You know, it gives freedom”.

“When we can sleep peacefully, like the European middle class, we will take out loans”.

Lviv-2

"Ideally — yes, ideally — a person can take out a loan for something, and a person will not be worried how to pay it off knowing that there is a stable salary, social guarantees, security and so on".

"...Firstly, they have a different interest rate — two to four percent; secondly, the banking system..."

"None of us feels relaxed knowing that there is a loan to be paid off... In our country, we do not have what they have in the West — that is the feeling of confidence that in 10 years they will not change the interest rate for you..."

"[Short-term] — of course, there were benefits. For you can solve the problem instantly (you will laugh — for a holiday). I know I will pay it off in a short period of time".

"Small loans are very useful, to purchase home appliances. They are interest-free and easy for people to pay off. When it comes to business and big money, there is a lot of hassle. In case of a mortgage, too, because this is big money, for a long period, and with a very high interest rate".

Kyiv-1

"For there is no legal framework — they will fool you..."

"Even an interest-free loan — it seems you do not have to pay but they say that it should be insured..."

Odesa

"In Europe, 3% loans are given out..."

"Not only that we have instability, we have no rules: bang! — and the bank raises interest rates".

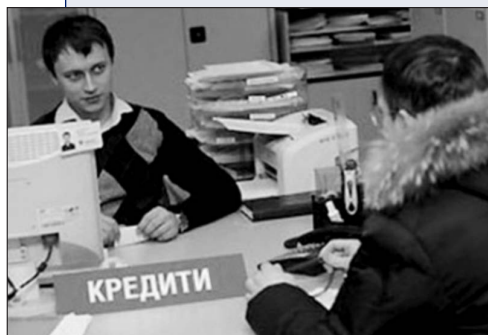
Kharkiv

"This is deceit. Well, because when you come and take out a loan, when the blue eyes are looking at you and saying, 'Take it out, we want nothing, it's interest-free...'.

You simply get a calculator and start counting, and she says — ah, here is insurance, and here is this and that... That is intended to deceive..."

"They know there are people who may misunderstand a lot so they use it to their advantage".

"I am OK with short-term loans — that is, if I can pay it off in a few months".



The participants also remain wary of keeping money in a savings account. Although savings accounts were referred to as both sources of income and means for accumulation and saving, they did not express unanimous confidence in banking institutions in terms of savings accounts.

Kyiv-2

“There are many examples when people put money into savings accounts, and due to inflation, these savings accounts go down in value completely. I know two people who due to the price shock lost a lot of money. At some point, when the dollar exchange rate started growing, the bank froze the deposits, and you could not take your money out”.

“When their banks went bankrupt, my friends lost their money”.

One should mention the influence of such factors as confidence or lack of confidence in the government, and other institutions, including insurance companies and banks, on forming the general atmosphere in the society. It is from the institutional level that this confidence / lack of confidence extends to all layers of society, including interpersonal relationships. The lack of confidence, in turn, prevents the formation of social solidarity and joint efforts of people in defending their interests and rights.

4. Confidence in the future. Most participants of the discussion stated that they had no reason to look into the future with confidence. The key factor of this psychological state is the ongoing war and situation in Eastern Ukraine. When discussing the attitudes they had before the war, the respondents’ opinions were divided. Some of them pointed out that they felt “confident, more or less”; others were convinced that they had lived with a sense of uncertainty for a long time, that “the situation, which led to current events, had started to worsen” much earlier.

Kyiv-1

“You go to bed at night and do not know whether you wake up in the morning...”.

“I [felt] more confident. Of course, this war has shattered us”.

“There has been no confidence before either”.

“Confidence has vanished. It was there two years ago, even three — the career was moving, the salary was growing. Then it has started, and the situation has been undermined long before: there is only terror on TV — raped, killed, burnt. All this resulted into this situation in the end...”.

“Information that is around — meeting friends, we used to talk about holidays, in high spirits. Recently, we have talking about who was killed and where...”.

Kyiv-2

“When today the country is at war, what confidence are we talking about?”

“[Before the war] there was more confidence, except for the period when Yanukovich was in power — it was getting worse and worse...”

Lviv-1

“We do not know what awaits us tomorrow...”

“Ah, we do not have a sense of stability, that’s it. Why do you keep asking this question? Well, where is stability? The country is at war — what stability? There has been no stability. You know that everything that happened had been programmed 10 years ago or more. What stability?!”

Odesa

“In our country, you cannot look into the future with confidence...”

“After the recent political events, there is no question of confidence or stability...”

“Tomorrow there will another coup...”

In general, to have more confidence in the future (in addition to ending the hostilities), the respondents need to have an overall stability in the country, some prospects (including for career growth), and a sense of social and legal security. It was during the discussion of the issues related to stability and confidence in the future when participants often (regardless of their age) mentioned the Soviet era, “socialism” and Leonid Brezhnev’s rule, when the entire life of a person was planned for many years ahead. When answering the question on what or who can provide this stability, they usually appealed to the state: “Our state. They should, you know, recognise the laws rather than change them every five years. Today one person comes and abolishes them, tomorrow another one comes and enforces them again...” (*Kharkiv*).

Kyiv-1

“The only factor is stability in the country. Everyone remembers Brezhnev: everyone was studying, everyone knew — you graduate, and go work as an engineer, and then — you become a head of warehouse, a head of department. You had specific career development. You did not want to work — then you could stop working and start receiving your pension...”

“Now you have an endless working day, and if you work guts out, you may become someone — some sort of a foreman...”

Odesa

“For the economic and political situation in the country to stabilise”.

“A stable job and a stable salary...”.

“As it was under socialism”.

Lviv-2

“Stability in the country. Political and economic stability means a lot. If there is stability — there will be jobs”.

“Your own savings — to be able to put some in a bank, as it was in the Soviet Union...”.

5. Prospects for old age support. The participants ironically called the retirement “the best years of life”, and often mentioned “a retired American woman in colourful shorts” travelling around the world. They expressed the following wishes: “I would like to have a watercraft of certain class and visit all the countries in the world” (*Kyiv-1*). However, almost all the respondents demonstrated understanding that the real prospects for retirement in Ukraine are quite different.

None of the participants thinks of his retirement with optimism or expects to live off his pension. Some count on children, but most — on themselves. Upon the retirement they expect to be able to either work (even in the garden) or lease a property they own (including their only home and live “in the kennel”), or move abroad, “to a country with a normal political system”.

Such moods reflect the respondents’ opinions of the state, opportunities (and their willingness) to influence both the state and their own lives.

**Lviv-1**

“I do not plan it [retirement] because it is just impossible. I will be doing what I have been doing my entire life. I am going to work, I will not retire”.

“In our country, we do not even try it, I guess. It will be exactly the same as it is now”.

Lviv-1 (continued)

"I hope some reform will be implemented, and it will be brought to something — not an insurance pension but... I still have time".

"You have time to sell everything you have acquired and move to a country with a normal political system".

"I own property, for example. I will not sell it but at least I have it. It just happened that we have a nice house..."

"You can rent property, and live, for example, in some kennel and have money all the time..."

"We hope to die quickly, instantly, and there is money in our purses for the funeral... As long as we are alive and well, we work in this country. In this country, people are cogs working until they wear off..."

"This is black humour — we are already used to it..."

Kyiv-1

"I know a lot of people who moved abroad because they think about pension. I have no such opportunity yet. However, I would move if it worked out".

"It is difficult to provide for because even the real estate... Planes will fly in from Chernihiv Oblast tomorrow, and you can lose your flat, bite my tongue..."

"I will grow cucumbers at the *dacha*".

"I will work at the *dacha* — grow tomatoes. Organic products. I have four restaurants around".

Kyiv-2

"Buy a flat, a property, and lease it out".

"There is hope that mortality will defeat the retirement age".

"We will sell the flat, the car, *dacha*... we will move to a village and live off this money".

"My husband's relatives are all in Germany already — maybe, we will also flee there. Or may be it will get better in our country?"

To sum up, most respondents are satisfied with their professional activities although they have experienced a change of profession and are also more ready to make such changes now — only without the risk of investing their own money in obtaining another degree. Verbal willingness to move within Ukraine is lower; according to the statements of many participants of the discussion, they are more likely to agree to move abroad.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPWARD MOBILITY (SOCIAL LIFTS)

The focus group participants discussed opportunities for upward mobility based on their own experience. It turned out that most respondents inherited their social status, i.e. they come from families of civil servants and intellectuals, who, by the standards of Soviet times, belonged to the middle class (sometimes to the upper class), sometimes — not in the first generation. A small share of participants (usually, the entrepreneurs) entered the middle class due to their own efforts.

The respondents are rather sceptical about the opportunities for a person from a lower class to get to the middle class, and from the middle class — to the upper class by acquiring proper education, personal qualities, and hard work. According to most of them, in order to move up the social ladder, you also need “useful connections”, luck and fortune. It should be noted that in almost every group, the same expression “to be in the right place at the right time” was used in this context.

1. The respondents who inherited middle-class status reported that they achieved this with the help of their parents, since they were able to enter appropriate social circles, had proper upbringing, education, and, sometimes, followed the advice of their parents or friends on choosing a profession. The respondents also noted that their property was inherited from or bought by their parents, including the property that they lease in order to gain money to invest in business.

It should be noted that middle-aged and older respondents drew attention to the fact that they were educated (including higher education) “when there were no tuition fees”.

Lviv-1

“My parents have given me love, first of all. Well, the money too, of course. And education”.

“We are intellectuals. Parents gave us everything. Did they give us life? — They did. Did they give us love? — They did. They tried to leave us at least one flat. Well, of course, they gave us everything they could”.

Kyiv-1

“...Parents have created the right conditions. Parents form us”.

“Parents should make you such a man”.

“It is the upbringing, help from your parents, and also your own character”.

“Only thanks to parents. I was born in a family of engineers — already since childhood, [they] have wanted only the best for me. First, they made learn to play musical instruments — it was cultural development. I like music. I did not take it further, did not graduate from a music school but at least I like it very much. Then, my parents helped me with the choice of my profession...”.

“Half-and-half — both parents and my own efforts”.

Kyiv-2

“They helped me receive higher education”.

“Family upbringing. Spiritual family values, which are instilled. Literature, music...”.

“Social circle”.

Kharkiv

“Well, basically, my parents are well-off, my wife’s parents were well-off, so she is well-off, too. I have a good job so...”.

“...My mother is a teacher, my father is a blacksmith. We did not have a car. We have always had a motorcycle. Also we owned a huge house. ...Well, we also got two flats in Belgorod from my husband’s parents, and a house in Belgorod. Also thanks to the parents, now we have the money that we can invest”.

“First and foremost, of course, education, right circumstances, and, of course, personal qualities — all together”.

2. The participants who are “self-made” and joined the middle class through their own efforts have also noted certain help from their parents, their family (usually, a husband) or other people. Sometimes, the example of a poor family from which a representative of the middle class comes from served as an incentive to make an effort and get to a higher social level independently.

Kyiv-2

“My parents were far from being wealthy, they gave me the opportunity to pursue higher education, I started making money, and then, together with my husband, we have accomplished something”.

Lviv-1

“Well, I think, yes, I achieved everything on my own. For I was a village boy, born in the village, the only thing is that I was sent to a military academy, from which I graduated. I built a career myself, I would say. Yes, I became deputy commander of a military unit, deputy head, got my own accommodation...”.

Kharkiv

“Thanks to my husband. We have something, thanks to his job. Let me say, we have succeeded financially”.

“Probably, also thanks to my husband because my parents gave me the education, and, helped — or rather pushed me. Thanks to my husband, I have my own business and develop it, following the example of my husband”.

“Thanks to my parents. Well, because they had little during Soviet times, and I did not rely on them — and I promised to myself that I would have a better life... I am middle class because I am an entrepreneur. If I lived in a village like them, I would not be middle class”.

Odesa

“On my own. But to be honest, when I was looking for a job, I met a person who trained me. He was not a relative, he was a total stranger, and he was looking for a good employee, and I was looking for a good job. He really taught me a lot, and thanks to him I was able to build a good career. My attitude changed, I realised that I can earn big money. I’ve started to believe in myself”.

3. When considering whether a young person today can acquire the status of the middle class, the participants preferred not the upbringing or proper education (as their own experience had shown), but his “go-getting” skills, “connections”, and, mainly, “luck”. Willingness and education were interpreted as necessary but not sufficient “starting conditions”: “If there is knowledge, this is a start...” (*Odesa*). However, even receiving high-quality education (which is very difficult for a young person from a poor family, as indicated by the participants of the discussions) does not guarantee that a young person from the lower class gains a higher social status.



According to the respondents, you need “talent, willingness”, “ambitions”, “communication skills”, “persistence” – all these qualities “play a role” but they are not enough.

None of the respondents doubted that “you should work” if you wish to obtain higher social status. For instance, to become middle class, it is better to engage in business, trade, or get an education in management and gain relevant managerial experience. However, in the course of discussion, the participants faced the need to have a start-up capital, which someone coming from a poor family cannot have by definition as well as the opportunity to take out a loan to get an education and/or start his own business. As a result, taking into account these circumstances, the respondents failed to identify possible ways out for a person from a lower class to join middle class, therefore they started mentioning such factors as “connections” or luck.

Kyiv-1

– **Does a young person stand a chance to become middle class due to his personal qualities only?**

– Of course! He should be in the right place at the right time.

– **Is there a guarantee that if you study well...?**

– No!

– No guarantee!

– I also think you have to fight for it. A relative of mine made it in Moscow by selling fashion jewellery in the 90s. He demonstrated his ambition and leadership qualities.

Odesa

“Determination is the most important thing”.

“Nowadays, determination is not enough”.

“He has to be in the right place at the right time. Knowledge, of course, is necessary”.

“Nowadays, the only thing that matters is luck, that’s it”.

“Knowledge is no longer needed. You need to establish useful connections and acquaintances to get a higher status. You see how people get jobs in the administration...”.

“You need relatives; if you have no money, no matter how much you strive for it, you will get nowhere! Of course, it is not possible nowadays. Has anyone here achieved anything without money?”

“It gets difficult without family, people, connections, and contacts”.

“It depends if you are lucky. It is like that — some people get help from an acquaintance, and others make it on their own. [Often] with someone’s help”.

“It is unpredictable”.

“You have to work”.

“No, you also need some capital”.

Kharkiv

“No, to be at the right place at the right time, as they say. If you are lucky with your profession, and if it is in demand, you will develop as well...”.

“A bit of luck. You need luck”.

“No, there should be some sort of good fortune”.

“Not to dream but to act”.



4. Opportunities (chances) for representatives of the middle class to move to the upper class were rated very sceptically by the respondents. “Connections” and “luck” virtually came to the fore. According to the respondents, in order to move to the upper class, you need to have an appropriate financial status and property ownership (that representatives of the middle class should have by definition). You need to “work very hard” (*Kharkiv*). Also, the following personal qualities are necessary: “enormous determination”, “ambitions”, and dedication but it appears that “in our country, it is not enough just to have these qualities” (*Lviv-2*).

Each group discussed the importance of having the right connections. In particular, they said that you could become part of the upper class by getting involved in politics, i.e. by joining a party, “In our country... You join a party – you get promoted” (*Kharkiv*). Luck and fortune (for example, receiving an inheritance) were often mentioned as well.

However, from a moral perspective, the conditions the respondents named, when discussing a transition to the upper class, appeared rather controversial (which, however, reflect the characteristics the respondents gave to the upper class before). Not only that they mentioned “stubbornness” and “greed” but also the ability “to walk over dead bodies”.

Kyiv-2

“We have two ways – either to steal or to marry an oligarch’s daughter”.

Lviv-1

“A person can have several degrees, and yet not be that smart to accomplish something in life... There should be some luck. Something should be inherent – I do not know – in nature... Also, you should have some support”.

“I would say you need to strike gold”.

Lviv-2

“Connections, probably. [However] even if you have connections, without money you will achieve nothing...”.

“Some inheritance may come out of the blue...”.

Kharkiv

“If you have a goal, you are really tough, and, roughly speaking, walk over dead bodies, you can achieve it”.

“I mean, it should be a person with no principles”.

“I think, in our country – yes. You can get there. Over dead bodies”.

Only one group in Lviv discussed favourable conditions for upward mobility in a more general context – at the state level. However, they gave only vague and imprecise description of changes that should take place: “to set things right”, “to conduct reforms”, “to reduce taxes” (*Lviv-1*).

In general, the respondents’ statements display that, *firstly*, most of them belong to the middle class owing to their parents. *Secondly*, in current Ukrainian realities, in order to reach a higher social level, personal qualities and skills (including the level of education) are not enough – you need support, money, useful connections as well as “luck”, and “good fortune”. In other words, based on the experience of the focus group participants, social mobility does not apply in Ukraine.

UKRAINIAN MIDDLE CLASS: LIFE VALUES

Based on what the participants said, life values of Ukrainian middle class are related to what their lives are filled with — i.e. family and work. Family wellbeing, children, health and work — the world of a middle-class person is concentrated mainly around these things that form his principles, life values and achievements. He seeks them and regards them as necessary for his happiness.

Stability and peace were named among the primary values, probably, due to the current situation in the country. Other values, life goals, and principles of the middle class mentioned by the participants of the discussions rank lower in this special rating.

1. Family and family values were mentioned first in all focus groups. As the discussion about life values of different social classes progressed, the focus group participants also highlighted other characteristics and advantages of the middle class, indicating that patriotism, spirituality, morality, compassion, responsibility, willingness to help the weaker, etc., represent its most prominent values and virtues.

As a result, a representative of the middle class was portrayed as an ideal human being that, however, was not fully consistent with other statements of the respondents, which were often unexpected. One group explained a higher level of patriotism among middle-class representatives as follows: “They receive salaries from the state; they are afraid of losing their jobs” (*Odesa*).

Kyiv-1

“Family values”.

“The level of education”.

“Spirituality and culture. He was brought up — and he will not steal, kill, or offend. The lower class cannot afford it, [the upper class can justify it]. Culture, spirituality — compassion, the ability to be happy for someone, empathy”.

Kyiv-2

“Family values, health... Family. There is nothing more important than that”.

“Stable political situation in the country”.

“First, health, then family, then work, and then stability”.

“To make effort for the sake of the children; to give them good education so that they could succeed in life — is also a value”.

Lviv-1

“The health of my family and friends comes first”.

“I think everyone agrees that health comes first. A person thinks about earning money too”.

“Maybe, there should be something sacred in life. The middle class has it. I mean Christian values...”.

“The middle class is regarded as fair”.

“Self-esteem. Self-esteem is a must”.

“Responsibility before family, first of all... And before the country and those who you work with”.

“Integrity in business”.

Lviv-2

“Family values”.

“Patriotism, probably”.

“Religion... Universal [values]”.

“Personal development... Self-improvement...”.

Odesa

“[The middle class values] family... Work... Health...”.

“They value their reputation”.

Kharkiv

“Family values... Family, health... Responsibility to provide for the family”.

“Culture. Nobody — I mean the middle class — stopped going to the theatre despite all the circumstances...”.

“Moral values are more evident, I think”.

“Stability... and work...”.

What totally matches the described understanding of values is the participants' understanding of what the achievement means to them, what principles and values guide them in life, and what determining features of their success are — all of this is also linked to family, work, and wellbeing.

“Achievements? All my friends have daughters. We meet. And the feeling I get when I lift my son onto my shoulders — this is an achievement. Promotion is also an achievement” (Kyiv-1).

“Firstly, to take care of your health, then work hard, take care of your family, and set goals beyond stability.” [For example], save for a holiday (Kyiv-2).

“An achievement is that I have changed my speciality for a number of times. I studied. Then, my achievement is that my children do not just have higher education but an education which they know how to use; they interact normally, and they have good jobs and work in a field that relates to their degree” (Lviv-1).

"The key factor for the middle class is probably work".

"Achieving greater benefits as a result of this work. To be able to afford more – shopping, holidays..." (Kharkiv).

2. Happiness. For most participants, the feeling of happiness is primarily connected with family – their health, education, and achievements: "Having children is happiness" (*Lviv-1*). Work also makes the respondents happy – success, bonuses, recognition, etc.

Trips abroad, often with family and children, bring happiness to many. Daily matters were also mentioned: "our cat ran away, and we found it", "a delicious cake, a sunrise", "something really hurt and then it stopped". Sometimes the respondents mentioned their financial difficulties: "If I am able to save a certain amount of money [on a trip with family], without limiting the amount of food we buy, that is already... the greatest happiness".

Sometimes, changes and events inside the country evoked the feeling of happiness, or war-related information like, "The news on the Internet showed that our guys killed 40 militants that day" (*Kyiv-2*).

Lviv-1

"Maybe, happiness is the ability to enjoy what you have, and this is enough for you. To be able to enjoy small things".

"When I went there for the first time – four years ago I went to Europe – Rome, Venice – when got on a bus and saw the skyline of Venice, I mean when we arrived there – I was breathless, am I really here? Oh my God, it was true happiness!"

"Personally, I am very happy about my child's achievements. I am immensely happy that at her age, she already speaks English, reads, and writes..."

"Well, happiness – indeed, everyone has his own definition of happiness. The birth of my son – it was something... the feeling of being a father..."

"Well, of course, children's achievements create such a strong feeling of happiness – when your child achieves something, you think: God, how smart he is, he is the smartest kid in the whole world. Indeed, you are very happy for the kid – more than for yourself... However, I remember when the museum purchased my painting for its collection – I was so happy!"

"Once I took my children – not all of them, I have to say, but the youngest ones – to Europe. It was also very nice".

"Good point – when I took my son on a holiday to Bulgaria for the first time, I was so happy and pleased".

Lviv-2

"The birth of children, probably... Especially of the first one..."

"Birthdays are always happy times..."

"When you are well-off – financially and morally satisfied..."

Kyiv-2

“The fact that the country has changed is the greatest happiness for me”.

“My daughter learns dancing, and when I see her performing in a concert, she dances really well — I am proud of my child”.

Odesa

“Happiness is when why children pass an exam...”.

“The birth of children”.

“Success at work... Bonus payment”.

“Simply laying on the grass and looking at the sun”.

“Financial moments — buying a new flat, for example”.

“A trip to the seaside and swimming all day long”.

Kharkiv

“Job satisfaction”.

“Happiness is when your loved one... pays attention to you. This is happiness”.

“I can have a lot of happiness, one thing — all relatives are alive and well. The most important thing is peace at home”.

“Personally, for me, happiness is very much connected with material things because I used to work very hard to have prosperity and money. For me, it was important to provide for and raise my children — it has always been important to me”.

3. “Life is good”. The importance of children and family was also reflected in how the participants view their life. However, for many, “good life” is also associated with solving problems for their adult children that is typical in Ukraine. “As they say, parents take care of children until retirement... their children’s retirement” (*Odesa*).

However, when dwelling on their lives, the respondents were likely to mention what they might never have in their lives — i.e. self-confidence and confidence in the future. The focus groups had repeatedly raised the issue of confidence, and their statements on this subject were mostly pessimistic.

Kyiv-2

“It is family. Children graduated, this is a sort of stage...”.

“You wake up — and you want to smile...”.

“You wake up and do not think about how hard you are going to work for ‘chickenfeed’. When money is coming, and you should not break your back by working in the garden”.

“You wake up — and you feel confident in life”.

Lviv-2

“When you and your family are all happy...”.

“A house, a car, healthy family... and everyone around you...”.

“Confidence in the future”.

Odesa

“Helping your children. Helping to solve social issues when children get married – when you provide them with accommodation... And help them when the grandchildren are born”.

Kharkiv

“When your family is well. Everyone is well-off, happy, and calm”.

“You’ve got everything you wanted, if your children had graduated; if you helped them to stand on their own feet. I am already happy”.

“The most important thing is that those people you tried to give everything to are grateful”.

4. Charity. As mentioned above, the participants highlighted such qualities as compassion, willingness to help and participate in charitable activities among the inherent virtues of the middle class. In general, most respondents were inclined to think that the middle class is the most active benefactor (“although it should be the upper”). Accordingly, the subject of charity was discussed.

It turned out that most respondents have positive attitude towards charity and have been involved in charitable activities by helping those in need (“first of all, all the poor animals, or the poor people...”, “I want to help every sick child”, *Kyiv*). Most focus group participants have recently donated money for the needs of the Maidan, the CTO volunteer battalions, and the army. “Less than we would like to but, yes, we donate money to support our army, we donated money to help the Maidan...” (*Lviv-1*).

However, most participants stated that they had no inner drive to take part in charitable activities, and were willing to help “depending on how ‘personally’ they perceived something that happened”; most respondents believe that helping relatives is already a “charity” and do not think they should help anyone else. It was often said that charity corrupts – people get used to it, and instead of dealing with problems themselves they start demanding continuous support from others.

Kyiv-2

“...This charity today... this Maidan... they placed boxes ‘Help the Maidan’... It is impossible to bear. And people help them...”.

“Charity creates laziness among people whom you help. Give them an inch and they will take a mile”.

Kyiv-2 (continued)

“The car park manager approaches me in the morning and says, ‘Give me a tenner’, and I realise that I am making the best donation. He gets over his hangover and is very happy. Then he is grateful the whole day. The rest is scam. It irritates me, and I am already telling them to bugger off — they run up to you at traffic lights with boxes for some sick children...”

Still, the respondents’ distrust of people in need or those who collect donations strikes the eye. The lack of trust is evident even among those who participate in charitable activities but do not trust others. As a result, most participants of the discussions showed support for “targeted”, “specific” charitable activities — when the fact that this particular person needs help was checked and confirmed.

Lviv-1

“I always donate to help animals. We used to volunteer to help them, and today we really see the results of our work — there are fewer homeless cats and dogs... However, I am suspicious when there are young people on streets asking for money, I will not give them anything”.

“Well, everyone thinks that this young person should better go earn some money. I am for targeted charity — you know what you can do to help, and you know where the money will go...”.

“...To give one hundred *hryvnias* to build a wall on the border with Russia is, I think, slightly ridiculous. Why ridiculous? Because I do not know where that money will go and whether it will get there at all. If I knew that it would be there, I would buy those concrete blocks [myself], you know?”

Odesa

“Positive [attitude towards charity] if it is targeted. Let us say, a child was injured and he is at the hospital, and you can check it, call them...”.

“Still, it depends on a situation. There are many families who do not want to work, and they are used to everybody helping them. You spread the word and everyone brings you clothes and money...”.

“Positive unless it goes to the account [of a foundation] and then is transferred from this account...”.

However when focus groups were offered to discuss a hypothetical case of winning \$100 000, the charitable activities were the last to be mentioned. Having suddenly received such a prize (some respondents even considered it small, “What is it — one hundred thousand dollars — a very small amount! There is nothing to spend it on!”), the focus group participants would spend it primarily on buying property — for them or their children, or to generate income from renting it out; sometimes — on buying a car or a yacht, or on travelling. Charity was mentioned less often.

Only one respondent stated that he was willing to create his own charitable foundation although with a rather interesting aim, “I would create training programmes and teach people that they are already happy the way they are.

For them to appreciate what they have. And be happy. I believe, if a person does not have something, he simply does not want to do anything to get it. Would you like some juice? Pour some and drink it. If you cannot, go, learn, and earn” (*Kyiv-2*).

Lviv-1

“Property for children. Another option is to build a house. Your dream house”.

“Not for children — to lease property and earn money”.

“I do not own property but I think I would like to buy a house abroad. Only abroad”.

“Well, as a rational person, I would calculate everything — I would invest partly in real estate, and also I want to go live in Spain”.

Kyiv-2

“This is not such a big amount anyway. I will spend it on buying a house. I do not like the place where I live. \$100 000 is a three-bedroom flat in some puny neighbourhood”.

“I will invest in something profitable. You buy a flat — and rent it out...”.

“I would invest some in a profitable business, and will use some to help animals. I would also visit the elderly who were left on the street, simply homeless. To organise such a facility where these people could live in”.

Odesa

“A motor yacht for \$60 000 and a cottage for \$40 000”.

“I would buy flats and rent them out. And I would live a good life. I know it for sure”.

“A cottage in the country, or to sell a flat, add some money, and buy a house”.

“First of all, I would buy property to rent out, and maybe, a car, and I would also help orphanages”.

“I would buy my sons a flat each, and donate the rest to those in need”.

Kharkiv

“I would probably give the money to my children”.

“I could invest — in a flat, for example, buy *dacha*, a cottage...”.

“I prefer a bank or real estate. Investment, if there is a reliable company abroad...”.

To sum up, we can say that primary values inherent to the middle class mostly come down to family — their health and welfare. The rest — achievements, prestige, the feeling of happiness, and understanding that “life is good” — derived from the material and mental state of their family circle. The participants had expressed their willingness to help those in need, mostly when all other needs were met, and if they were certain that those in need could not deal with their problems on their own.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY

One of the key questions was the question on civic engagement of various strata of the Ukrainian society, including the middle class. Summarising what the respondents said on this subject, it should be considered that discussions took place shortly after the Maidan (the Revolution of Dignity) and against the backdrop of events in Eastern Ukraine.

1. The issue of civic engagement of the middle class, compared to other social classes, proved to be extremely controversial. Indeed, in one of the groups, most respondents argued that the middle class was more active because it was patriotic, educated, and understood “the atmosphere in the society”. However, when directly asked about the attitude of the middle class towards civic engagement, most participants answered that it was “not good”.

“[Middle class] is the driving force in any case... They are more active, for sure...”

“I know a lawyer who recently joined Donbas Battalion. He bought a bulletproof vest for UAH 500 himself, he bought a helmet for UAH 2000 himself, he bought gloves, glasses – he equips and arms himself, and fights for Ukraine. This is middle class...” (Lviv-2).

Other groups, however, expressed doubts about a high level of civic engagement of the middle class (“It is more active than, let us say, other classes. But I do not think it is the most active...”). Some respondents denied any engagement on the grounds that, *firstly*, the middle class had something to lose; *secondly*, they lost faith in possibility of making changes in a legal way.

Odesa

“There are no active citizens among middle class”.

“The middle class, as it seems to me, always adapts to any life changes”.

“I think that the middle class expresses proactive attitude”.

“Express what, where have you seen it? You all stay at home, what do you express?! They do...”.

“Today we stay in, and tomorrow we will come out”.

“[They will not] because they think they have nothing to do with it”.

– Is this typical of all Ukrainians or just the middle class?

“This is legal nihilism, not believing that you can change anything in a legal way. They – the middle class – just do not believe it”.

It was also suggested that the upper and lower classes are more active. The middle class avoids changes not because they have many possessions but

rather because they fear to lose that small number of assets they managed to accumulate and save (“Nothing corrupts like small but steady income”).

Odesa

“Oligarchs have something to lose, their millions and billions so they are more active. The lower class has nothing to lose and they are active too. For the middle class, as long as they have a bowl of soup and something to put on, they will remain quiet and adapt to anything. For example, Odesa did not rise like the East did. Odesa citizens have jobs. They make money. They have something to eat and something to wear. That is why we do not understand them, we are afraid to lose everything...”.

“I think that [the lower class] — they want changes more. Those from the upper class do not want to lose what they have. That is why they are more active politically...”.

“Everything that it [the middle class] has — salary and work. People defend the important elements of life — the ability to eat, to dress, to go on holiday. So far, they have it all...”.

“...We are going to wait, we will be quiet for now”.

2. As statements of the focus group participants show, their social activity does not spread beyond their household, hallway, or the yard. In examples of their civic engagement, the respondents appealed to communal events such as hallway renovation, yard cleaning, installation of a boom barrier, etc. “Active citizens” organise more extensive maintenance works — mostly women, often retired — who approach the local authorities and seek fulfilment of their demands.

It should be noted that in this case, active pensioners are considered not only to be middle class but also to form its core.

Kyiv-1

“In every house, especially in condominiums, there are active citizens, mostly women. The elections are coming; deputies are bribing everyone with promises of renovation, etc. Those active citizens, who are the backbone of middle class, they say — we do not need buckwheat, make us a car park. Do not paint the playground, make us a fence. Plant flowers here...”.

Lviv-1

“Yes — representatives of the middle class get together, try to solve something, then often give up, and do not gather again for a long time...”.

“It is not that extensive — within one neighbourhood...”.

“Yes, the middle class [is active]. We have renovated our hallway, and then someone ruined it again, burnt the elevator button — we are talking about the lower class...”.

Odesa

“The street where I live was very damaged and bumpy. The residents of our block visited one deputy, and promised to vote for him if he repairs the road. We voted for him, and he resisted for a long time but our old ladies kept on seeing to him, saying, ‘You bastard, we voted for you! You have promised us!’ but he kept postponing it, said it was too expensive. Eventually he repaired the pavement, not the road”.

— **What deputy?**

— I do not remember.

— These old ladies, one of them is a teacher. They are middle class, and they are active. They are intellectuals, they are committed. They were going around collecting signatures”.

“In every building, there are ladies like this”.

“They have the time to do it...”.



3. None of the focus group participants worked for NGOs and only two of them were members of political parties, which before the Maidan were in the opposition. None of them planned on joining NGOs or parties created during or as a result of the Revolution of Dignity. Most participants of the discussion explained this situation by the lack of confidence in all organisations and/or their leaders as well as disappointment in new political parties and politicians.

Kyiv-2

“Usually, an NGO is an organisation that serves interests of one man. I am also a member of another organisation. I just forgot to mention — the International League for the Protection of the Rights of Ukrainian Citizens... We are supposed to help someone. The director is always on every TV channel. This is an organisation of one man, big name and that is it, nothing else! All other organisations are roughly the same. Someone has invested money, created an organisation, and uses this money in elections”.

“Organisations do nothing but collect contributions. They don’t make sense to me”.

Odesa

“I am just not interested because... in every organisation, there is a lack of something — there is no Lenin to arrange everything beautifully. Today, Klychko is a wonderful man — this is the UDAR party. This party lacks something too. One negative thing, second, third... We — the middle class — see it clearly. Some speak up and others — remain quiet. There is something negative in every political organisation...”.

However, most respondents clearly stated that they did not want to be socially active all the time, and that they generally lacked either time or willingness, and, as in previous case, had no faith and confidence in their (collective) actions.

Lviv-1

“You know... they ask an artist back in Soviet times, ‘What is your attitude to the party politics?’ — ‘You know, I do not have an attitude to politics, I paint mountains and await changes. I am doing my job’”.

“We do not have time”.

“[It is not about time but] about willingness — I do not want to”.

“I do not want to. I was even offered to be a chairperson of the parents committee in the kindergarten — I refused. I thought — do I need that headache? To look for cheap toys or stationary... I do not need that. I am like the rest Ukrainians here — I am not my brother’s keeper. Excuse me but you should have time for your own child, not to spend it on others”.

Odesa

“There is no time... I work a lot, I simply have no time to do it”.

“I do not believe in it and I do not need it”.

Kyiv-1

“No [need], there is no time for it”.

“You do not have to join it. You can participate in their events — that is it”.

Kharkiv

“I have never done that. Well, I am not interested and there is no time... No need”.

“What is the point? There is no need... It will be as it has to be anyway”.

The discussions often showed that respondents wanted to appear socially attractive, better than they actually are; they engaged in wishful thinking, and tried to demonstrate the uniqueness and ideal of the middle class — if they mentioned a holiday, then not just a passive holiday on the beach but always an educational one; if leisure, then spending time not in shopping malls or in front of the TV but in theatres and museums; if charitable activity, then they generally shared positive attitude towards it but mentioned charity fraud; if civic engagement — they tried to appear active and committed but alluded to the fact that they have no time and there are no respectable NGOs to trust.

It can be assumed that the very topic of “the middle class” proved to be somewhat abstract for the respondents. It was hard for them to link their views to a realistic assessment of various aspects of life of the middle class and put the ideals aside. Furthermore, as it was mentioned above, the middle class itself has not been formed, and does not represent an average social stratum, as it should be ideally. The respondents expressed an opinion that Ukrainian middle class falls short of academic definitions, at least because it is at the stage of formation, and, therefore, in extremely poor conditions.

MIDDLE CLASS AND THE MAIDAN

The events at the Maidan (the Revolution of Dignity) were not a mandatory topic of the focus group discussions. This topic however emerged during the assesment of civic engagement of different social classes. The Kharkiv focus group was the only group not to touch upon the subject of the Maidan.

It should be considered that the discussions were held in May-June 2014 when many protesters of November 2013-May 2014 either had formed volunteer battalions to participate in the Counter-Terrorist Operation (the CTO) in Eastern Ukraine or returned to their towns and jobs. The protesters, whose social level, intentions, and actions were not entirely clear to the public and caused mixed attitudes, continued to stay in Maidan tent camp in Kyiv at that time.

1. Almost all the participants who raised this subject were unanimous in determining the reasons of the Maidan: the Yanukovych's regime had aggravated a number of acute problems existing in Ukraine and forced people to protest – corruption, “protection racket”, “injustice and lawlessness”, inability to defend violated rights even in court, deprivation of rights and humiliation. Moreover, these elements affected the whole society, not just someone personally.

Lviv-2

“If there is anarchy and lawlessness in the country, then, accordingly, it affects everyone, absolutely everyone. No one can avoid this”.

Kyiv-1

“[The middle class] protested [for their rights]. A threat to dignity. The Revolution of Dignity was not named so for nothing”.

“At some point, everyone faced injustice. He swallowed it because everyone did that, it all had accumulated”.

“There was injustice in courts so they rose”.

“What is there to discuss, people were pushed over the edge”.

The last straw – the reason for renewed protests – was the beating up of students on the night of 30 November 2013. “If the students were not beaten up, people would not have come out” (*Kyiv-1*); “Speaking of the Maidan, and how it started. They started beating up the children. [They encroached on] the most sacred” (*Lviv-1*). Such perception of violent actions against students corresponds to the respondents' attitude towards family and children as the greatest value.

2. However, the respondents' opinions were divided on the issue of whether leading role in the Maidan events was played by representatives of a particular social class (lower, middle, upper). Indeed, the Lviv groups insisted that representative of the middle class were the first to protest, they were the “driving force” behind the Maidan, they organised protests, ensured the presence of people and “cash” (the focus group participants also helped the Maidan financially). “The activists at the Maidan are the middle class...”, “If there had been no middle class, the Maidan would not have happened”.

However, there were the remarks that representatives of the middle class had to fill in for each other since they could not be constantly present at the Maidan because they were afraid of losing jobs. Representatives of the lower class were at the Maidan all the time, and were provided with everything necessary by representatives of the middle and upper class.

Asocial groups were also present at the Maidan but, according to the respondents, they did not define its spirit or actions, “Of course, asocial types were also coming there. When porridge is given out for free, there will be the asocial groups, of course. But I do think that Maidan survived thanks to the middle class, and to those donating money and organising it” (*Lviv-1*).

Lviv-1

“[The Maidan] — thanks to the middle class. Although the upper class financed it too — I know that my friends came. There were a lot people I know. Businessmen came and were handing out windbreakers, cleaning the Maidan, carrying sets, and bringing bags with medication. However, mostly the middle class was present there”.

“The lower class was there, you know, but it was there to create the crowd”.

“I will tell you, all the buses going to the Maidan were paid by the middle class. In Lviv”.

“Also, how many doctors were at the Maidan!”

“I would like the middle class to be like that but actually... I support the opinion that there were many, many of them at the Maidan... No, the middle class went there, they did — one day, two days, up to four days, maximum. And those who were unemployed stood there. Those who were entrepreneurs, employed — taking time off, were afraid of losing jobs... Because you have a family, you have children whom you need to feed, and if you are not there for two weeks, you will definitely get fired. No matter how much your boss supports the Maidan, nobody will cover for you. The lower class was there all the time. Our guys went there but for a day or two. Filling in for each other...”.

Lviv-2

“...Well, I think, the Maidan survived thanks to the middle class, thanks to those donating money and organising it”.



On the one hand, Kyiv groups argued that the middle class was the most active on Maidan, and that its representatives “organised the revolution” (*Kyiv-1*). On the other hand, most participants were inclined to think that the lower class had started protests on the Maidan and was the main driving force behind it since “they had nothing to lose”. Representatives of the middle class could join the protests for a limited period of time, and therefore,

supported them financially, helped with provision of food and accommodation for protesters from other cities, etc. However, they did not participate in long-term protests because they worked and did not want to risk losing their jobs.⁷

Kyiv-1

“No, the middle class did not burst”.

“All this was started by the lower class — the most active part of the population”.

“I think that the entire lower class was in turmoil because they had nothing to lose! Then, the middle class and others joined”.

“Those who stayed in tents — they are the lower class. And those who are still there — also the lower class”.

Kyiv-2

“The middle class is quiet, they do not go to the Maidan or to protest because they have something to lose. They will not stay there — because they have jobs, they will not risk jobs for the sake of the Maidan!”

“No, they will not go to the Maidan but may support it in some way”.

In the Odesa focus group, the opinion that the Maidan was full of “homeless people” and that the middle class continued working, clearly prevailed.

Odesa

“Of course not. The homeless gathered on Maidan”.

“The same story as in 2005”.

“The lower class also gathered back then”.

“The upper class and oligarchs counted their millions, the homeless stood at the Maidan for 200 *hryvnias*, and the middle class worked their guts out”.

As mentioned above, the Kharkiv group did not touch upon the subject of the Maidan but in the context of discussing civic engagement of the middle class, claimed that representatives of the lower class participated more actively in the events of winter 2013-2014 (without specifying on which side — the Maidan or the Anti-Maidan) because for them it was an opportunity to earn extra money.

Kharkiv

“This is an opportunity — when we were forced to go to the square — well, invited — some money was paid. For them [the lower class], it is a way to earn money. So they stood there and protested”.

3. Divergent assessments of the events on the Maidan. Based on the context of discussions, the Lviv groups shared positive attitude towards Maidan, in Kyiv the perceptions were mixed, and in Odesa — rather critical. Possibly,

⁷ One of the Kyiv groups raised the question of regional representation at the Maidan. Indeed, it was argued that “nothing would happen without Western Ukraine”. However, this opinion was objected to, “...Kyiv came out first. The next day, half a million took to streets in Kyiv” (*Kyiv-1*).

the participants' opinions were influenced by a certain disappointment in the new government and military operations in Eastern Ukraine.

One way or another, it seems that some respondents in the Kyiv and Odesa groups condemned the Maidan, did not believe in its independent nature, and regarded that it was organised by oligarchs – they gathered the lower class at the Maidan and took advantage of the situation to bring down Victor Yanukovich's regime and come to power.

Kyiv-1

"Political scientists have long summed this up and said that it was political technologies, pure and simple — and that is it. It is true but what is also true that the people were brought down to this state".

Kyiv-2

"Personally I am not sure that Yanukovich was a great enemy, that he was stealing in such amounts. And what have we done? We lost territory, we have brought the war to our territory".

"I agree 100%".

Odesa

"Still, the Maidan gave the feeling that you can influence the government... It was the middle class that brought down Yanukovich's regime, was not it?"

"They brought it down — those who have come to power now. The same oligarchs".

"Old politicians".

"Old politicians took advantage of the situation".

"...What happened at the Maidan was... the result of political technologies. These were infusions of either America or the West".

4. When discussing the Maidan the focus group participants did not rule out the possibility of the third Maidan – but its potential causes were described somewhat differently.

Lviv-1

"If this whole present system and 'protection racket' continue, and I think, it will cause a new Maidan, and the people will rise again".

Odesa

"I think that very soon the middle class — after Yatsenyuk's call to 'tighten the belts', after they will increase gas and electricity rates... When the middle class has no money to pay for necessities, the basics, even to eat — the middle class will get angry".

"Today, if fighting in the East does not stop, eventually it will result in revolt. Namely of the middle class. The lower class will not participate as it did before, the middle class will join. Now the new government has been given time. But if there are no changes..."