

# UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES

**SCHÜLER  
HELFFEN  
LEBEN**

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(eds.)

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Schüler Helfen Leben is the largest youth-led aid organization in Germany. It supports and operates youth and education projects in south-eastern Europe, Jordan and Germany with a focus on youth involvement, political education and anti-discrimination. In 2022, projects for young people affected by the current war against Ukraine were added. Once a year, Schüler Helfen Leben organizes a Social Day throughout Germany, when 60,000 pupils swap their school desk for a job for one day and donate their wages to their peers. This raises about 1 million euros every year.

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# Editorial

## Executive Summary

Michael Hilbert, Patrick Hoemke  
and Jule-Sophie Pösges

translated from German by Bianca Tosti  
and Jonas Zimmermann

Giving the young generation of Ukrainians the opportunity to make their voices heard in times of war and thus ensure the most effective possible support for their needs – these were the central goals of the online consultation UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES, which was carried out by Schüler Helfen Leben together with the National Ukrainian Youth Association (NUMO) and in cooperation with the participation platform Make.org.

Over the period of six weeks, nearly 20,000 young Ukrainians participated in the interactive online consultation – an impressive number, especially against the backdrop of the dramatic situation in which the country continues to find itself.

In their contributions, young people looked beyond the topics of war and acute emergency relief. Looking at the 280,000 votes and 678 proposals, it becomes clear how the young generation envisions the democratic rebuilding of the country.

International leaders who want to support Ukraine now and in the future should be guided by these perspectives, wishes and needs. Schüler Helfen Leben will also adapt its own work for children and young people from Ukraine based on the results – and with this publication invites civil society organisations and institutions to do the same. In addition, this supplementary publication gathers numerous voices from Ukrainian and German civil society. They focus on the entire spectrum of social solidarity – and thus provide important food for thought and action even beyond the young generation.

## Youth Participation is Already Important Today

The young generation must not be overlooked when dealing with medium- and long-term consequences of war. Even though looking at current and most urgent needs on the ground will remain decisive for Schüler Helfen Leben and certainly all other international players, it is advisable to also take the empowerment of young people in Ukraine into consideration at an early stage: The young generation will play a vital role in rebuilding the country and its future social and political shape. At the same time, children and young people are particularly affected by the hardships of war, as shown by the statistics on escape and displacement as well as the experiences from other war and post-war contexts. Both aspects suggest to continue supporting young people in particular, but also to strengthen their skills and self-confidence.

Psychosocial projects and services can be starting points for this, but they are not enough. The results of the consultation show that young Ukrainians see their future in their own country and wish for a society based on European standards. This largely progressive view of their own society must be taken into account in international programmes. On this basis, it is not appropriate to apply standardised solutions in current mitigation and when rebuilding the country.

There is the risk of the young generation being discouraged and left with a sense that their own needs are insignificant. To avoid this, first of all it is important to enable empowerment and experiences of self-efficacy. Furthermore, there should be taught skills on how to assume responsibility in a democratic and future-oriented post-war society.

## Ukraine's Future Voices

The online consultation of young Ukrainians which constitutes the foundation of this publication pursued an interactive and collaborative approach. Designed to be digital and open to results, easily accessible via social media, it was appealing to the young generation. The expertise of the participation platform Make.org was central to this. It is a Europe-wide, transparent and independent civic-tech organisation, seeking to involve citizens in participatory democracy processes.

The key question was simple: “Young Ukrainians: how can we help you in shaping your future?”. With this approach, the consultation differs from usual surveys, as the questions for participants are designed as openly as possible. During the eight-week consultation period, nearly 20,000 participants took the opportunity to submit 678 responses and voted on the proposals 280,000 times in total. With a few additional closed questions, statistical basic data could be collected.

The participants are young, with the majority being female - 90% are between 13 and 24 years old, 57% are female. Education and the education system are the top issues. Democracy, institutions, (mental) health as well as social assistance have been given great importance, too.

The results of UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES are particularly exciting: on the one hand, the consultation is, to our knowledge, the only survey currently available taking such an active look at the needs of young people since the beginning of the invasion in February 2022. However, the status quo is quite challenging: There are various studies and survey results from previous years which repeatedly identify critical issues with regard to the social participation of young people. For example, low levels of participation and recognition of young people in political processes were identified, paired with

a lack of trust in the institutions<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, we are all the more pleased to see the high level of participation of young people in our consultation.

## Needs of the Ukrainian Youth

UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES shows an impressive consensus among the participants on many topics. The fact that many points match the results of similar surveys among young people in EU countries shows that young Ukrainians have similar values, concerns and priorities.

The fact that the modernisation of the education system is the highest priority for the Ukrainian youth illustrates a clear orientation towards the future, even during the present times of the war. At the same time, looking at the results, particularly in the field of anti-corruption, Ukraine shows a strong desire to position itself as a well-functioning European state. Accordingly, many participants see the future of Ukraine in the EU.

This fight against widespread corruption must therefore be a high priority – particularly to avoid losing trust in the institutions which has just been growing lately. Thus, the online consultation took place in the view of the fact that during the war, Ukrainians have greatly increased their political trust in a variety of state institutions and the importance of civic identity. Levels of trust were very low before, as a long-term study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (last survey in December 2022) shows. These developments express strong social cohesion in times of war. They also represent the social starting point for this consultation. So the question arises as to how and whether current levels of trust and social cohesion can persist in the long term, and last in a new social order of post-war society.

Further central conclusions from the online consultation are, for example, that, in addition to democratic values and European standards, economic prosperity is also a pivotal prerequisite for the young generation's optimistic view. As expected, the focus was also on the discussion of national identity(-ies). It deals not only with the view of today's Russia, but also the context of the Soviet legacy. It was striking that proposals mostly included proactive measures to strengthen national unity, Ukrainian culture and history, while restrictive measures were discussed rather controversially.

Illiberal opinions also shine through at various points.

Examples include proposals that touch on the rights of LGBTIQ or other minorities, or promote economic protectionism. However, bearing in mind the results of studies from previous years, this is not surprising and these proposals did not receive majority support. They are therefore controversial ideas within the consultation. The importance of civil society engagement and participation does not appear to be seen as a critical issue for establishing a democratic post-war order yet.

## A Look at the Broad Practice of Civil Society Commitment

Supplementary to the presentation of the results of the consultation, numerous practical and research-related insights – from Ukraine and Germany - into the war against Ukraine are part of this publication. The aim is to illustrate the various approaches of civil society to support Ukraine, and to give insights into the needs and requirements of these players.

Dr. Oxana Matiychuk from the University of Chernivtsi describes perspectives from Ukrainian society and reports on the challenges of maintaining the education system under war conditions.

Sebastian Wells (Ostkreuz) and Vsevolod Kazarin illustrate the Russian war of aggression with photographic perspectives from their recently published magazine "Solomiya No. 2".

In "Solidarity is on the Agenda", Schüler Helfen Leben reports on the previous commitment to children and young people in Ukraine and describes which further developments are necessary to support the young generation of Ukraine appropriately and for the long term. Young Ukrainians who took part in these projects will also have their say.

Aida Bećirović and Saša Madacki look at the Ukraine war from the perspective of Sarajevo/Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite all the differences to the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the authors share key experiences and identify five theses regarding valuable learnings for civil support in Ukraine.

In an Interview, Annegret Wulff (MitOst) emphasises the importance of trusting civil society networks in organising emergency relief for Ukraine after the beginning of the large-scale invasion. She also explains why civil society actors who were forced to flee from Ukraine also need support. She suggests how to avoid these actors being lost to Ukraine when rebuilding the country.

The relations between the German and the Ukrainian

civil societies are also the subject of Kateryna Pavlova's contribution (CRISP e.V.), who describes the conditions which must be met to successfully support Ukrainian refugees in Germany. She lets their voices and the voices of their supporters be heard.

Philipp Berg, project manager for the funding programme "Volunteering helps together", the Ukraine funding programme of the German Foundation for Engagement and Volunteering (DSEE), outlines the results of the funding programme and describes learnings from its implementation.

The article "The Ukraine War on Tiktok and a Peace Education Classification" by Cora Bieß (Berghof Foundation) is dedicated to the phenomenon "WarTok", the peace-promoting potentials and conflict aggravating dangers of the social media platform. It also identifies the need for peace education with regard to the situation of young people in Germany.

Oleksandr Podobrii of the Ukrainian Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture (ARCA) describes the impact of both crises, the Covid pandemic and the war, on his country's young generation. Ukrainian students express their personal perceptions – and Oleksandr also looks at the situation of young Roma in the war against Ukraine.

## What's Next

The brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has changed the realities of life. This applies first and foremost to Ukraine, but also to Germany – as this publication clearly illustrates with regard to young people in various places.

At the same time, however, this publication also shows the power civil society can mobilise for cross-border solidarity, provided that it receives the necessary support from society, politics and institutions, and is oriented towards Ukrainian needs and requirements.

This is the central learning of UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES and the contributions of this publication: The voices of Ukrainians must be heard if they are to be supported effectively and purposefully.

This also applies to the young generation that sees its future as a European Ukraine. They want to be an active part in shaping the future of the country. For shareholders and institutions in Germany, this publication shows what kind of support is needed: for the people in or from Ukraine, for civil society, which is doing an outstanding job, and thus also for Europe to be fit for the future.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. <https://www.fes.de/en/beitraege/comparative-study-youth-in-russia-ukraine-and-belarus> or <https://ukraine.un.org/en/51418-state-youth-ukraine-2019>

# Perspectives from Chernivtsi

## Oxana Matiychuk About Living with the War in Western Ukraine

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann



**Oxana Matiychuk**  
University of Chernivtsi

Oxana Matiychuk is Deputy Head of the International Office, German philologist and lecturer at the Chair of Foreign Literary History and Literary Theory at the Yuriy-Fedkovich National University Chernivtsi in western Ukraine.

“On the one hand, it would be nice to have a text in the publication which describes the feeling of everyday life in Ukraine. On the other hand, it would also be interesting to address the situation of students”. These were the guidelines for my contribution.

Not an easy task. Do I have the moral right to write about “everyday life in Ukraine” living in Chernivtsi, in a city near the Romanian border, in the far southwest of Ukraine? We – the local residents and the city as a living environment – do not really know the war, only some of its consequences. Limited power supply, the loss of many jobs, disrupted supply chains, increased prices, air raid alerts which repeatedly interrupt the normal course of life, many refugees from the southern, eastern and northern regions – in the Chernivtsi area more than 100,000 people are said to have found refuge – daily funerals of the fallen, hospitals whose capacities are barely enough to accommodate the wounded soldiers – these are the aspects of the new day-to-day life. But this does not compare to everyday life at the front in places such as Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv or in the border region Sumy or Chernihiv, where the Russians heroically shoot at “neo-Nazi” residents with all kinds of long-range weapons on a daily basis. Also, it does not compare to the lives of the people who survived the horrors of occupation, those who were tortured or lost their families, friends and homes.

In Chernivtsi, there are disturbing factors which are inconvenient, but not existentially threatening. If you work in education, you are obliged to interrupt your lessons and go to the shelters when the sirens sound. At university, however, it is not mandatory to stay there until the all-clear is given. During longer air raid alerts, many simply leave the shelters. You never know how many minutes or hours you have to stay down there. As you leave you are carefree, convinced that it is not likely...

As a resident of the city, you are immediately affected if

you fight at the front. If you lost a family member at the front. I sometimes wonder how many people are actually left who are ready and willing to fight. I immediately try to push this thought to the back of my mind. You are affected if a family member comes back wounded. You are also affected if you are involved as a volunteer – for the front or for those who are internally displaced. Only in this sense would I be affected, because volunteering alone helps me to more or less maintain my psychological balance.

More than 500 internally displaced people live in the student dormitories of our university. The university team of volunteers, to which I belong, ensures that these people receive a food package once in ten to fourteen days. It really is not much, but we still manage to do that regularly. Since September, the local government is not able to provide this service to officially registered people. The food aid is not enough. Free Churches, NGOs and international aid organizations continue trying to provide support. Our university team of volunteers is now part of a network; in fact, Ukraine as a whole is a network in which everyone is striving to defend the front and the hinterlands, wherever possible with the efforts of civil society.

Since the end of March 2022, a woman from Mariupol has been living in our two-family house. She has become a normal part of our family and gets along well with everyone in the house – this was very fortunate. I admire her fortitude and optimism. She teaches me new recipes and I wonder how it feels when everything you could take from your past life fits into a small backpack.

Thinking about the students' situation is taking me to a place I would rather not write about. But the memories persistently come back to me. Nothing special in the reality of Ukrainian higher education. In mid-January 2023 I had to conduct an exam. A retake, for those who had not passed their first try. Introduction to Literary Studies, not an easy subject for the first semester. In her second

try, Alina knows just as little as in her first one. She behaves as if she were about to faint. I know the trick. In the briefing prior to the exam, I was asked by the dean to offer her “maximum support”. I take a close look at Alina as she is trying to put together a few sentences. Her physical appearance was immaculate and her fingernails were professionally done. Alina's time investment in her looks is striking. I resist the urge to ask if she is volunteering or at least helping her parents around the house. Also, I know by experience that there is no correlation between perfect fingernails and poor knowledge. I must not judge, so I simply ask her what comes easy to her in her studies. Reciting poetry, she said. I ask her to recite a poem of her choice. Indeed, she is doing a better job. I give her the minimum mark. She passed. Who knows, maybe one day she will learn what studying at university means. However, I can not get rid of the thought that obviously, someone has grasped very little in these terrible times. At the same time, I am thinking of one of her fellow students who made a completely different impression on me: Victoria. In war language, she is called a „dvitchy VPO“, „double displaced person“. VPO is a Ukrainian abbreviation meaning “person who was resettled within the country”. Victoria and her friend Olha came to my office hours because they wanted to practice how to determine the metre of poems. I had suggested this as I had realised that very few of the students in the seminar were dealing with this topic at school. Still, it is part of the examination. On two tables in our office, there were children's items which we purchased thanks to the donation of “Schüler Helfen Leben”. They were sorted and were waiting to be picked up. When the two of them asked me what that was, they said they would be happy to help in case something like this would be organised again. I got into conversation with them. Viktoria explained that in 2014, she and her parents went from Donetsk to the Kherson region. At the start of the war, she and her mother fled to relatives in Novoselytsia, a county town about 20 km from Chernivtsi. Her father wanted to go to the front, but he was rejected due to health issues. Yet, he repairs vehicles for the Ukrainian

military as he is a car mechanic. The repair shop is close to the front line. "I was speaking Ukrainian in Donetsk. My father taught me that it is important and right. In school this was exotic. Many did not understand me. They even treated me with hostility. However, I soon realized that I wanted to study Ukrainian philology and become a teacher. I really like children and I firmly believe that Donetsk will be liberated, so I will definitely go back and work there." Victoria's tone was not filled with pathos at all. She is calm, conscious and very convincing. She seems much more mature than a 17-year-old. She lives in the dormitory and likes it there, despite the many inconveniences. I feel great respect for this young but already so determined woman. My dearest wish is for her wish to come true. So that she can experience her hometown Donetsk as a Ukrainian city and be a part of shaping life there.

A few days later, sad news appears on all official channels of the university: Taras, a student at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, has fallen at the front. Three days before his 19th birthday. Forever 18. He didn't have to go to the front, but he consciously decided to. "He did English-Ukrainian Translation Studies. Studied for a single semester, was among the best. In the second semester he went into battle. At the faculty, we raised money for his equipment. Unbearable to hear the news about his death." says a faculty lecturer, her eyes filled with tears.

I am thinking of one of the best students from the field of Literary History and Literary Theory. I supervised his bachelor's thesis. Ivan was outstanding in his field of

study. He simultaneously finished a three-year psychology degree in Vienna, spoke fluent English and his education ranged from Aristophanes to Slobodan Šnajder. In his bachelor's thesis, he dealt with Julio Cortázar. Also, he had a scholarship for a master's degree in the USA lined up. Shortly before his final oral exam in May 2022, he wrote me an email: He had decided to join a regiment and would soon depart for training. I was genuinely surprised, and at the same time had not the slightest doubt that his decision was thought through. I replied that I would wish for bright minds like him to be reserved for academia, but that I greatly respected his decision. He joined online for his final oral exam and the state examination. In November 2022, I heard from him. He was part of a military staff, unfortunately he was not allowed to report on his work, but he was fine. As I am writing these lines, I realise that I should reach out to him again.



*Emergency Aid organized by the author arrives at an orphanage in the region of Chernivtsi*

# Phantasy in Resistance

## Photographic Impressions from Ukraine by Sebastian Wells und Vsevolod Kazarin

by Gerrit Prange

The photo series by Sebastian Wells and his Ukrainian colleague Vsevolod Kazarin was created as part of the **SOLOMIYA MAGAZINE**. The war events and the front are not in the foreground - it is not directly about war photography - instead Wells and Kazarin focus on what is happening behind the front in Ukraine. Thus, the second issue is primarily about the artworks that have been created in Kherson despite the Russian occupation.

The independent magazine not only wants to encourage people to think about the stories of the Ukrainians who fled in 2014 and 2022, but also to represent and explore the Ukrainian cultural and art scene. Especially the young, creative Ukrainian generation should find a platform through the project to be able to express themselves.

It is about showing them the perspectives that the Russian government has been trying to silence for many years. Resistance with the means of art.

The second issue of **SOLOMIYA** was created in Kyiv and designed in Berlin. Published on March 24, it has since been available through [shiftbooks.d](https://www.shiftbooks.d). The magazine is published in English and costs €18.00.



















## About the Photographers

**Sebastian Wells**, born and raised in Berlin, is a member of the Ostkreuz photography collective and an artist at Galerie Springer. He works on commissioned and his own documentary photography projects. Sebastian studied photography at the Ostkreuzschule in Berlin, the FH Bielefeld and the KASK School of Arts in Ghent.

**Vsevolod Kazarin** works on artistic, editorial and commissioned projects. Born in the Luhansk region, he now lives in Kyiv, where he grew up. He studied photography at the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts.



# Solidarity is on the Agenda

**How pupils from Germany support young people in Ukraine, what is important for the future – and how emergency relief and empowerment go hand in hand.**

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann



**Patrick Hoemke**

Patrick Hoemke is SHL's managing director. He studied political science with a civil society focus and geography in Münster, Warsaw and Duisburg. Patrick is passionate about impactful involvement and empowerment of youth in Germany and Europe.



**Michael Hilbert**

Michael Hilbert is team lead for SHL's department of international projects and partnerships. He studied political science with a polity focus in Rostock, Granada and Dresden. Since January 2018 he has coordinated SHL's projects and partner organizations in the Western Balkans, Jordan as well as Ukraine and the neighboring countries.



**Jule-Sophie Pösges**

Jule-Sophie Pösges is working in SHL's communications and partnerships department. She studied social sciences in Düsseldorf and is currently working on her Master's degree in political communication. From August 2022 to March 2023 she has been coordinating the online consultation Ukraine's Future Voices

## SHL's Commitment after the Attack on Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, the shock and feeling of helplessness dominated in this country. For the committed staff members of Schüler Helfen Leben, the parallels to the origins of their organisation during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s were obvious. Our thoughts were quickly with those affected by the war in Ukraine. It was clear that especially children and young people would not only suffer from the consequences of war, violence, displacement, but also from lack of prospects and the loss of their homes, which would make them dependent on support.

Help and basic care should be provided as soon as possible. In the 1990s pupils initially collected relief supplies without any organisation and drove into the war zones of Yugoslavia by private cars. In 2022 it was consciously decided to use the experience of three decades of youth and educational work within the context of war and post-conflict in order to help as effectively as possible with the available means.

Just as in 1992, 1998 and 2013, it was also clear to us on

24 February 2022, that we were committed to take action not only because of our founding history, but also because of our vision and mission - as responsible players of German civil society that want to answer the needs of young people in times of (post-) war, and as an organisation that wants to give children and young people a voice and opportunity to speak up for peers who live in difficult conditions. We ourselves did not want to stand idly by – and we wanted to enable children and young people in Germany to transform their own feelings into effective actions. This article summarises the lessons learned from more than a year of commitment for children and young people in Ukraine and gives an outlook on how future support can be shaped effectively.

## Go for it!

24 hours after the attack on Ukraine, the team of SHL had launched a fundraising campaign under the motto #togetherinsolidarity. The campaign was meant as a movement in which everyone regardless of financial means can participate and implement group actions – whether at school, in sports clubs or within one's own circle of friends. The necessary funds for first relief measures were to be collected this way.

In a very short time, 200,000 euros had already been collected and were used by local partner organisations in the border regions of the neighboring countries Poland and Moldova to support refugees. Accommodation, food and hygiene products were provided – as well as psychological and legal advice for people arriving in a new environment or traveling further. Emergency relief measures were also quickly implemented in Chernivtsi/Ukraine. Even at this early stage, the basic needs of children were at the centre of our attention.

SHL did not hesitate to react quickly and with our network and the experience from three decades of involvement in war and post-war societies, we also knew how and where to start.

„Kharkiv who holds a workshop in the park in front of the university on how to blow bubbles. Unfortunately, I cannot be there for all the activities, because I hold interesting discussions with my students on literary history, but a picture is worth a thousand words. At a sunny day in the park, not only children, but also adults seem to enjoy themselves. I am amazed at the versatile shapes of foam. There are many children from refugee families, says L. afterwards. The pictures show happy faces and people enjoying simple things. One might think that a natural state of every human being is to rejoice and let others rejoice. One could be so naive. Human beings remain a mystery.“



**Oxana Matiychuk**  
Ukrainisches Tagebuch  
(Süddeutsche Zeitung)

its neighbouring countries could be directly supported in their immediate and impressive commitment. Solid existing networks to Eastern Europe were key in this endeavour.

In line with our profile as a supporter, we were particularly keen to work directly with small local organisations and volunteers. That way, we were able to ensure very quick and effective support. A visit to Poland and the Republic of Moldova at the end of April 2022 made the dire need for support very clear. Talking to partners - a familiar parallel to the situation in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s - we learned that even after two months of war, the aid efforts of some major international organisations had not yet arrived in sufficient scale. Measures implemented by the respective governments received clear criticism regarding reliability and need-orientation. Civil societies would like to help refugees, but would not receive the support they need in order to do so and would thus feel left alone and overwhelmed<sup>1</sup>.

The following guiding principles apply for SHL's engagement in emergency relief:

- We do not perceive the target group (refugees) as passive, but as an active target group with an eye to their own needs. Therefore, all our partners actively

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the situation in Poland, also see Ciobanu, Claudia (2023): A YEAR OF WAR IN UKRAINE: REFUGEES PROVE THEIR VALUE IN POLAND AND ELSEWHERE, see online: <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/08/ukrainian-refugees-prove-their-value-in-poland-and-elsewhere/>

The commitment of Schüler Helfen Leben as a supporting foundation outside of Germany has so far been focusing on Southeast Europe and Jordan. However, starting with emergency and reconstruction aid during the Balkan wars in the 1990s, continuing after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war with many direct grants along the Balkan refugee route and as cooperation with partner organisations on the ground in both project regions and through the SHL office in Sarajevo, we have always understood our work as a response to war and displacement.

One of the lessons learned from this story for the work after the 24 February was that there are organisations and institutions that have more experience and practice when it comes to collecting and transporting relief supplies on a larger scale. So even before concrete measures were taken, we made the decision to use our network to find local partners in Ukraine and its western neighbours to support them in a flexible manner and according to their acute needs. Our rapid emergency response proved to be very effective as civil society in Ukraine and

- include the target group in the support services.
- Our networks consist of partners that are rather small, trustworthy organisations and initiatives that are locally rooted and often volunteer-based.
- We use the traditional term of emergency relief in a much “broader“ sense since we include education and leisure activities. From the beginning, we looked beyond the acute emergency relief (housing, clothing, food)
- We are willing, where necessary, to cover financing gaps that are considered unattractive by other donors, but can greatly increase the impact of projects (e.g. structural costs).

## Young People in Germany: Providing Support – but how?

From the 24 February, we witnessed how the attack on Ukraine affected and unsettled young people in Germany. Through our already well-established close contacts with schools, student representatives and teachers within the framework of our Social Day programme, we quickly learned how widespread feelings of insecurity, anger and fear in Germany were, once the idea of a peaceful Europe as a ‘norm‘ was disrupted, especially for young people. However, the desire to help the people of Ukraine quickly developed alongside those feelings. Nevertheless, in many places there was a lack of imagination and ideas on how to provide hands-on help.

Our fundraising campaign for peers under the motto #togetherinsolidarity struck a chord in Germany. Throughout the country, decisive actions were carried out, from solidarity concerts to cake sales to large-scale fundraising runs, in which individual schools collected tens of thousands of euros. The Social Day, SHL's central form of action, was of course much influenced by the war in Ukraine. And so, on 23 June, 2022, pupils swapped their everyday school life not only for a job to support peers in South-Eastern Europe – but also for children and young people affected by the war in Ukraine.

All these actions not only served to collect donations, but also enabled students in Germany to set a sign of solidarity. Feelings of insecurity and powerlessness were transformed into active action and assuming responsibility for peers. These actions thus made a self-efficacy experience for young people possible, which demonstrated how an accumulation of small contributions can set larger things in motion.

In addition, we have made an effort to enable students to deal with the situation of their peers in Ukraine. In May and June, we offered video streams for schools in Western Ukraine for young people to stay in contact with each other. More than a 1000 pupils participated in the initiative run by Peer Leader International e.V.

## From Emergency Relief to a “Project Region”: Long-term Commitment as a Sign of Sustainability

The experiences we gained over the recent decades made clear that flexibility plays a special role in project work. Schüler Helfen Leben was aware of the fact that needs can change continuously (even spatially). At the same time, we set our sights on long-term support.

The first projects were developed in the neighbouring countries of Poland and the Republic of Moldova along the refugee routes. For example, they supported arrivals with food, hygiene products, they arranged or provided accommodation and consultation services such as 24-hour hotlines (see info boxes for details).

Soon we were able to get active in Ukraine itself. At the beginning, the Ukrainian-German Cultural Society distributed relief goods to internally displaced persons in Chernivtsi in cooperation with SHL. Children e.g. received toys to create distraction from the everyday life of the war.

## Accommodation for Refugees in Moldova Ecovisio/Moldova



Our partner EcoVisio offers young refugees and their families accommodation and first basic services at its environmental education centre in Rîlcova, Moldova. In six Moldovan villages, vacant houses were also prepared for occupancy. For example, an abandoned school building has been renovated in Cociulia and made habitable - in the future it will serve as a community centre.



## Care and Support for IDPs in Western Ukraine

### German-Ukrainian Cultural Society Chernivtsi



The Ukrainian-German Cultural Society Chernivtsi supported internally displaced families with first basic services as well as care and counselling services. For example, the student dormitories of the local university were set up as emergency shelters. To distract children and adolescents from everyday life during the war, toys were distributed and playgrounds were set up. In addition, our partner organisation provided information for the German media and advised refugees on options for departure and onward travel. Oxana Matyichuk from the Ukrainian-German Cultural Society Chernivtsi regularly reports for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in her "Ukrainian Diary" about her experiences and impressions on-site.

## Support for Refugees in the Polish-Ukrainian Border Area

### Foundation Homo Faber, Lublin/Poland

Homo Faber supports young Ukrainian people and their families who fled to Lublin, Poland and to the border regions of Ukraine. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, emergency shelters, childcare, psychological support and advice in many areas were provided and relief supplies such as food and medicine were collected and transported to the border crossings to Ukraine. Sustainable structures were set up to support refugees and volunteers on-site in the medium and long run.



## Support for Arriving Refugees in Poland

### NGO SIEW, Kielce/Poland



Our partner organisation SIEW supports refugees from Ukraine in Kielce, Poland. Distributing food and clothing as well as providing psychological counselling and childcare was paramount. SIEW has been promoting cultural exchange between Poland and Ukraine for years and was therefore an immediate contact for Ukrainian refugees in Kielce after the Russian invasion. The volunteers coordinated the reception and dispensing of food, hygiene products and clothing in their supermarket-like distribution station. Accommodation, language courses, cultural activities and workplaces were also organised, as well as psychological support and care for young people and children.

It was already possible in May to raise additional funding for the existing projects. In this way, the reach and impact of the projects could be increased beyond the donations collected by students. Various private and corporate foundations trusted the expertise and experience of SHL and provided a total of EUR 170,000. Thanks to the partners of *Schüler Helfen Leben*, the donors were able to provide fast, immediate and effective emergency relief for Ukrainian children and young people without having to struggle with red tape.

The growing engagement in neighbouring countries and Ukraine itself quickly raised the question of a longer-term prospect for support, despite all the basic principles of need-orientation and flexibility. We decided, also in accordance with the wishes of the young people participating in Germany, to expand and institutionalise our support services in Ukraine. In order to secure this commitment in the long term, further partners should be recruited who have an interest in providing targeted and effective support to children and young people affected by the war. They benefit from the effectiveness of the projects organised by *Schüler Helfen Leben*, their strong local connections and the many years of experience in project funding in war situations and post-war societies.

## Focusing on Own Strengths

In the 1990s, *Schüler Helfen Leben* provided reconstruction aid in addition to acute emergency relief after the end of the wars in former Yugoslavia, particularly for children and young people in the form of schools and nursery schools. In Ukraine, on the other hand, the focus will be on psychosocial, empowering and informal aspects of education. In doing so, we not only want to make use of our strengths and experiences gained from three decades of work with young people in war and post-war contexts, but we also want to involve young people in designing activities and projects. This is to avoid working with "default solutions" which do not meet local needs and contexts. On the other hand, children and young people in particular represent a segment of the population that is often overlooked in situations of war and crisis (cf. Aida Bećirović's and Saša Madacki's contribution in this issue). However, involving them is of particular importance: not only are young people disproportionately affected by flight and displacement, they are also among the most vulnerable groups in a war. The more severely restricted the living conditions and the places to learn and meet get for the 11.5 million young Ukrainians, the more difficult it is for them to develop prospects for a desirable and self-determined future. This is all the more important because rebuilding and shaping the future of a free and democratic

Ukraine will particularly depend on the commitment of the young generation. We are therefore convinced that young people have a right to participation and support in times of crisis, too. As experts in their own rights and leaders of the future, children, adolescents and young adults must already be heard now. That is why *Schüler Helfen Leben* has launched the online consultation "Ukraine's Future Voices" presented in this issue (see also below). It gives young people a voice in the current situation of war. It also identifies topics which can serve as a basis for future education and participation projects for young Ukrainians. The results also act as a guide for project activities in Ukraine beyond the current situation of war.

## Shelter Ukraine

The project „Shelter Ukraine“ is rooted in an initiative by dedicated Ukrainians in the small town of Verkhovyna in the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains. There, psychosocial activities such as sports, therapy, training, advanced training and excursions for young people and their families who are internally displaced were offered after the Russian invasion began. In May 2022, SHL began funding a spinoff of this project ("Shelter Lviv") in Lviv, Western Ukraine. After a visit to the partner on site and the successful completion of the first project period, it was decided to expand the project to eight locations, launching the project „Shelter Ukraine“.

Today, the project is already doing valuable work to facilitate the arrival of young internally displaced people and their families in a new environment and to promote integration into the local community. It supports children and young people in dealing with traumatic experiences and thus strengthens young people in their development. At the same time, the pressure is taken off parents when their children are taken care of in a safe environment.

For the future, it will be crucial to put the project on a solid financial base, as so far it has heavily relied on a voluntary basis. The aim is to continue the work with reliability and predictability for longer periods of time and for the benefit of the participating children and adolescents. Reliability is important to achieve the integrating effect of the project and to provide future prospects for young people affected by the war. In particular, this applies to components of the project which are supposed to enable the participants to get active themselves. Following the principle of perceiving refugees as active individuals rather than passive target groups, those components of the project which enable young people to make their own commitment to the community are particularly important. For example, if participants assume responsibility as part of the project, for example as trainers for other children and adolescents, they

for social and political reforms.

From three decades of promoting education, democracy and engagement of young people in South-Eastern Europe, SHL has identified five approaches that should also be taken into account for successful empowerment in Ukraine. These are described in more detail in Becirovic's and Madacki's article in this issue. They refer to a) the importance of involving the young generation in support programmes, b) strengthening the connection to local communities when working with young people – especially outside the big cities, c) teaching leadership skills to young people and encouraging them to take up appropriate positions in civil society, d) individual mentoring and personal support and e) the importance of professional and economic prospects for a positive approach towards the future in their own country.

## International Engagement Must not Be Limited to Emergency Relief

Even though Schüler Helfen Leben and all international players are guided by the current and most urgent needs on the ground, it is advisable to take an early look at the empowerment of the young generation of Ukrainians. This is also shown by the consultation Ukraine's Future Voices presented in this publication: Young Ukrainians are already thinking beyond the acute situation of war. They are overwhelmingly looking for a future in a free, democratic and state guided by European standards. In order to create the basis for this, existing offers of psychosocial support, such as the "Shelter" project presented in this article, must also be integrated into other support measures, making sure they can continue and be financially equipped for the long term. This not only helps internally displaced persons to cope with their trauma, but, looking ahead, also to integrate returnees from abroad.

## Impacts on SHL

After more than a year of commitment to children and young people affected by the war in Ukraine, it has become clear that a lot can be achieved through decisive action and widespread social support. At the same time, major tasks lie ahead of international players: The war continues. As the willingness to donate is in decline and civil society actors are expected to experience fatigue, international players must keep up their own efforts. The tireless commitment of Ukrainian civil society, combined with the optimism and confidence of the young generation in Ukraine, also shows that the course for a future in freedom must now be set. On the one hand, this means helping young people in particular to

experience self-efficacy despite the challenges of their own personal circumstances. In addition, in the medium term, this also strengthens self-confidence and trust in one's own abilities – also, regarding time and location, it has a significant effect beyond the concrete project. However, project approaches of that kind require a longer-term perspective and financial security. As part of this support, the components of the project are also planned to enable networking among the participants of the eight locations. For this purpose, both online components and mutual visits are conceivable.

## From Emergency Aid to Empowerment

So, empowering the young generation is the medium to long-term approach for effective SHL project work in Ukraine. If it is common sense that this applies in peacetime, there are enough reasons to consider strengthening the role, skills and self-confidence of young people now:

In general, it should be noted that young people in war have less access to education and less participation in social and cultural life and therefore less exchange with peers, as well as less encouraging career prospects. This is what psychosocial projects concentrate on. In addition, it should not be underestimated that war-related hardships can leave young people feeling insignificant and discouraged. Empowerment must start here: Programmes to strengthen young people's self-efficacy address the pressure that the young generation experiences during and after war situations. Additionally, they are designed to teach young people skills, preparing them to assume responsibility in the post-war society, for example, with a view to a democratic and future-oriented society. This lays the foundations for young people to actively participate in social developments, instead of just being passive members in a target group

take the future development of their country into their own hands. On the other hand, it is important to provide long-term support for the people of Ukraine.

At Schüler Helfen Leben, we are ready to accept this challenge and invite institutions and key players to support us in this. We bring in our expertise from three decades of work in war and post-war societies, striving to institutionalise our services and regularly reflect on our approaches in order to achieve the best possible impact of the programmes.

For us, this also includes being on the ground. We have deployed an employee to Ukraine and are setting up an SHL office there. This entails continuous, close and trusting work with local partners. They are doing an impressive job under difficult conditions and enormous psychological stress. In return, players abroad are asked to adapt their working methods and procedures: The need to support and respond usually does not follow office and business hours.

However, it is also important to remain open and interested, to closely follow developments and needs and to adapt the design of one's own programmes accordingly.



*The Shelter project supports young IDPs at eight locations in Ukraine - from Lviv to Poltava*

# Empowered Youth as Agents of Change in Times of Crisis

„You are only young once, and if you work it right, once is enough“

- Joe E. Lewis



**Sasa Madacki**

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groups exploded into full-scale aggression toward Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conflict was further complicated by the intervention of foreign powers, such as other European states which sought to further their interests in the region. The conflict's outcome was devastating, with over 100,000 lives lost and millions of internally displaced persons.

In 2022, Ukraine, a nation already grappling with nearly a decade of aggression and atrocities on its soil, was invaded by Russia. The result has been a rapidly mounting death toll and forced displacement of millions of people, including a significant proportion of the country's children and youth.

Long-term political and social processes of defining its affiliation in international politics resembled conflictual identities existing since the breakup of the Soviet Union. During these, ethnic and linguistic identities have played a relevant role and have been exacerbated by Russian foreign policy and influence-seeking ever since<sup>1</sup>.

Acknowledging all differences, in both cases, civilians have suffered the most as powerful outside forces seek to further their interests in the respective countries. The attempted destruction of the economic, educational, and health infrastructure by Russia can be expected to have devastating long-term consequences, especially for civilians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the violence was accompanied by the unraveling of civil society, whereas in Ukraine, the strong and resolute response from civil society to the war provides hope for the country's future development.

Civilians in both countries have been caught in the crossfire of violence, destruction, and displacement. Young people have been disproportionately affected as they bear the weight of rebuilding society in the aftermath of conflict. During the war, they were denied access to education, social and cultural life, connections

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s and the war against Ukraine are stark reminders that peace in Europe is not guaranteed. Russia's Invasion has overthrown long-standing certainties and substantially changed the political landscape of Europe. Even though current events are not synonymous with the situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s or the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in general, we see similar impact on the young generation, their rights and opportunities. Drawing from our experience of almost 30 years of working with youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, fostering empowerment and participation, we will identify important learnings which should be taken into account when designing programs and support for Ukraine's young generation in a time of war and recovery.

Amidst the strife-torn society of Bosnia in the 1990s, ethnic and religious tensions reached a boiling point. A legacy of complex ethnic, religious, and nationalist rivalries which has had been compounded by the political ambitions of external powers, resulted in violence and displacement of civilians: The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the breakup of Yugoslavia, a country that was home to various ethnic and religious communities including Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. As Yugoslavia dissolved, nationalist tensions between the different

<sup>1</sup> Shokohi, Hera (2023): Hera Shokohi stellt vor. *Nation und Sprache seit 1991. Ukrainisch und Russisch im Sprachkonflikt*, <https://te.ma/art/04d4q3/besters-sprachpolitik-ukraine-rusland/> (retrieved 09.02.2023)

## Sacred Theory of Youth Empowerment

Empowering youth is a process that gives young people a sense of agency and control over their lives. It is rooted in the belief that every young person deserves the right to make decisions and take actions that positively impact their own lives and those of their peers. It is guided by core principles of self-determination, inclusiveness, respect, teamwork, and thoughtful consideration. These principles enable young people to grasp the challenges they face, build their skills and confidence, and drive positive change through informed decision-making and action.

A thorough review of the literature<sup>2</sup> on youth empowerment reveals a diverse array of perspectives. Of the 454 research papers analyzed, 59 conceptual approaches, 40 theoretical concepts, and 195 models, levels, and dimensions were discussed. Empowerment is perceived as a dynamic process leading to a specific outcome by some authors, while others stress the significance of individual, organizational, and community level factors. The wide range of disciplines, including psychology, education, politics, economics, and social and cultural studies, further adds to the complexity of the concept. The study implies that empowerment may be more insightful in the contexts of weakness or lack of power rather than in terms of a positive concept that varies depending on the individual, group, or situation. Most empirical research on this topic implies discussions of self-efficacy, motivation, and the perception of control over the socio-political sphere. This indicates that most studies focus mainly on theoretical approaches and lack empirical evidence. This highlights a need for further research to demonstrate the various levels and dimensions of empowerment.

No matter what theoretical approach, concept or model is used to discuss operational strategies or programmatic interventions, one crucial point remains the way new generations and youth thinking shapes the understanding of moving beyond past atrocity, conflict or violence is understood to determine how the future of a society might look<sup>3</sup> taking into consideration that “the

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Xavier Úcar Martínez, Manel Jiménez-Morales, Pere Soler Masó & Jaume Trilla Bernet (2016): *Exploring the conceptualization and research of empowerment in the field of youth*, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2016.1209120; This section contains extracted concepts from systemic review. Full bibliographic records can be seen in originating study.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, Elizabeth A., and Karen Murphy. 2014. “History Education Reform, Transitional Justice, and the Transformation of Identities.” In *Identities in Transition: Challenges for Transitional Justice in Divided Societies*, edited by Paige Arthur, 334–369. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press according to Dženeta

with their peers, and employment opportunities - in short, their everyday life was disrupted. To avoid repeating the same tragic events that took place during the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, all Ukraine and their allies, both during and after the war, must pay attention to the well-being of young people.

Our experience of being part in the rebuilding effort after war highlights the crucial role that young people play in shaping the future. As the hardships that young people face during conflict can leave them feeling marginalized and disempowered in a post-war society, we consider youth empowerment to be crucial, even if the conflict is not resolved yet. Youth empowerment is an essential factor in any conflict situation. It helps to address the pressure young people feel and experience in a post-war society. Furthermore, it contributes to peace and understanding that are vital for a democratic society. Empowering young people allows them to become more involved in decision-making processes and embody a clear future-orientation in a post-war society. It also allows for the voices of those affected to be heard and respected in a way that might otherwise not happen.

Moreover, youth empowerment helps to reduce the hopelessness and despair many young people feel in conflict situations. Giving them a sense of purpose and direction can provide a positive outlet for their energy and help them productively. It is also vital for young people to be allowed to develop skills and knowledge that can help to make a difference in their communities, as this can help to create a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Finally, giving youth a platform to express their views and opinions can help to create a more open society that is less prone to conflict.

education and shaping of views of the youth that are to become the next generation of citizens and leaders is a critical element in determining whether they become active citizens, oppressed subjects, or perpetrators of the old system. (...) The extent to which youth issues have come to the fore and youth themselves have coalesced and have participated in the political process will be reflected in the future vitality of each country<sup>4</sup>.

Empowering youth to actively participate in society, rather than merely being passive recipients of reforms, is essential for creating a society that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of young people in post-conflict countries. Education, both formal and non-formal, plays a critical role in this process, and must be a key focus of reform efforts to ensure that young people's voices are heard, and their perspectives are valued.

Recognizing the crucial role that formal education can play in promoting peace is vital. While there is an understanding of the importance of reforming education in post-conflict societies as part of transitional justice agendas, recent scholarship has also shown how education can foster and replicate conflict in divided societies<sup>5</sup> as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Education in post-conflict societies is heavily politicised<sup>6</sup>. New generations' understanding of the past is considered important to help shape the future of fragile transitional societies, whether through education or through institutions for youth<sup>7</sup>.

The significance of non-formal education cannot be ignored as it plays a crucial role in supporting formal education systems. Non-formal education equips individuals with the necessary skills and competencies to adapt to the fast-paced and ever-changing demands of our rapidly developing technological, social, and economic landscape. As a key aspect of lifelong learning, it empowers both young people and adults to continuously develop and refine their abilities, keeping them ahead in an ever-evolving world<sup>8</sup>.

To effectively tackle the challenges faced in conflict and post-conflict societies, we must acknowledge the crucial

*Karabegović (2017): Aiming for transitional justice? Diaspora mobilisation for youth and education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*

<sup>4</sup> Diuk, N. M. (2012). *The next generation in Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. supra 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Chayes, Antonia, and Martha Minow, eds. (2003) *Imagine Coexistence: Restoring Humanity after Violent Ethnic Conflict*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. according to Karabegović (2017)

<sup>8</sup> *Recommendations of the Committee on Culture and Education of The Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (Non-Formal Education Report, Doc. 8595, 15 December 1999)*

role that both formal and non-formal education can play in empowering young people to rebuild their communities. As youth often spend a significant amount of time in schools and various non-formal civil society organizations and youth groups, these educational settings provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary for making informed choices and actively participating in their society's reconstruction. This includes promoting reconciliation of differing perspectives and experiences from and during times of conflict, such as when reintegrating returnees from abroad.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) emphasizes the importance of including youth from the beginning of all processes relating to conflict and post-conflict situations. This resolution stresses that disruptions to youth access to education and economic opportunities significantly impact achieving durable peace and reconciliation<sup>9</sup>. It also recognizes that a large youth population can contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place<sup>10</sup>. The resolution encourages states to facilitate an environment where youth actors from different backgrounds are recognized and provided with adequate support to prevent violence and foster social cohesion. It also emphasizes the need for policies that positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, such as providing quality education, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, it encourages states to support projects designed to foster a culture of peace, tolerance, and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as well as discourage youth from engaging in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

Although some of these factors may not be relevant in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, it is crucial that young people are actively involved in every stage of the process. Their engagement and recognition as key stakeholders is necessary for making meaningful progress and realizing meaningful change.

## Lessons learned from SHL's engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 1992, a group of high school students from Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, was inspired to take action after witnessing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on television. What started as a small initiative quickly grew, with 300 German schools joining the effort. The students collected and delivered 30 tons of relief supplies to Bosnian pupils in refugee camps in Croatia. The movement spread throughout Germany, with various

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

regional groups forming. In 1994 and 1995, the SHL office in Sarajevo provided educational materials to over 40,000 pupils in Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, Mostar, and Goražde and sports equipment and teaching materials to schools. Additionally, a portion of the funds raised through campaigns and donations was invested in rebuilding schools and kindergartens that had been destroyed.

Since the war, SHL BiH has continued its work, establishing the Association of high school students and the Association of youth media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both organizations remain important youth-led entities in the country today. In 2002, Schüler Helfen Leben Germany made the transition from being an association to a foundation – the first foundation established by high school students in the country – to provide long-term support and financial stability for projects in South-East Europe.

As explained above, SHL has made a remarkable impact on youth development in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its humanitarian aid, rebuilding of schools, and direct empowerment of youth have helped create a better future for the next generation. It has become a model for other organizations and its efforts serve as an example of how international solidarity can be used to support development.

Engaging young people in the peacebuilding process has highlighted the importance of youth empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This includes providing them with the skills, resources, and support to help build peaceful communities, engage in constructive dialogue, and help to resolve conflicts peacefully. Through education, training and mentorship programs, youth are given the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that can help them become active agents of change in their communities. Additionally, by encouraging youth participation in decision-making, addressing their concerns, and promoting their active participation in community activities, sense of responsibility for their future can be instilled, thereby enhancing their resilience and ability to handle conflict.

SHL's youth empowerment initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina showcase the remarkable potential of young people to effect transformative change. By providing youth with the tools and opportunities to become leaders in their communities, the organization has been able to drive positive and inspiring growth. The impact of SHL's work in the country is evident, and many lessons can be taken from the organization's example of youth-led initiatives.

Here are some of the lessons from SHL's work in Bos-

nia and Herzegovina on youth empowerment:

1. **Invest in youth:** In Bosnia and Herzegovina, SHL has found that investing in the education and development of young people has long-term benefits for the country. By providing resources and opportunities for young people to learn and develop, SHL has fostered a culture of youth empowerment and community involvement. SHL has taken various steps to support the education system in Bosnia, such as supplying educational resources, constructing new schools, and enhancing existing ones. The organization has also focused on advancing teacher training and professional development. This lesson emphasizes that supporting young people should be a top priority for all stakeholders in rebuilding Ukraine.
2. **Foster relationships:** SHL has found in Bosnia and Herzegovina that building strong relationships between young people and their communities is essential for youth empowerment. By organizing positive activities and initiatives, SHL has brought young people together and established robust bonds with their local communities. The organization has supported community-based projects, provided mentorship and leadership opportunities, and hosted workshops to promote social cohesion, create a safe environment, and strengthen relationships. If applied in Ukraine, this approach will enhance the impact of youth support initiatives. Moreover, given the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, SHL has worked and continues to work towards bringing together young people of diverse social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, promoting positive youth development and fostering lasting peace and building trust.
3. **Cultivate Leadership:** SHL's work in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlights the importance of empowering young people to take on leadership roles and become actively involved in their communities. The organization has equipped young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective leaders and advocates for their communities through training and guidance. It has also created opportunities for young people to network and gain hands-on experience through internships, projects, and events. SHL has also created an array of online resources to aid young people in developing their leadership skills and boosting their confidence. By fostering leadership among the youth in Ukraine, they will be able to realize their full potential and make valuable contributions towards rebuilding the country.

4. **Offer Mentorship and Support:** SHL has recognized the need of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina for mentorship and guidance to achieve their aspirations. By connecting young people with experienced mentors who can offer advice and support, SHL has helped them reach their full potential and become successful members of their communities. Through workshops, seminars, and other activities, young people have gained the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed. The organization also offers youth groups and, when necessary, personalized one-on-one mentoring and coaching services, allowing mentors to provide tailored advice and support to individuals or groups. Programs in Ukraine should place a strong emphasis on personalized support, recognizing the unique needs and goals of each individual, to maximize their impact.
5. **Create job opportunities:** SHL has helped create job opportunities for young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina by connecting them with local employers. By offering apprenticeships and internships, young people have been able to gain valuable work experience and develop skills that will benefit them in their future careers. For a post-war society in Ukraine, the economic wellbeing of its citizens and a sense of prosperity will be critical to help young people envision a positive future for themselves in the country.

## Youth empowerment: State of Affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlights the crucial role that the state must play in supporting and empowering its young generation. Even nearly 30 years after the war, the government's efforts in youth empowerment have yet to yield significant results. An examination of the Security Council Resolution on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security highlights the unfulfilled provisions set out in the resolution. Despite being adopted in 2015, 20 years after the end of the Bosnian War, it serves as a valuable benchmark to evaluate the lessons (not) learned and provides a framework for effective youth engagement and education. It clearly illustrates the shortcomings in these areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making it a useful reference for future efforts.

The failure to incorporate young voices in decision-making processes, both domestically and internationally, has resulted in a significant gap in youth engagement and participation in conflict resolution and prevention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, during the peace negotiations and implementation of peace agree-

ments, the perspectives and involvement of the youth were not considered, leading to a lack of policies supporting their role in peacebuilding initiatives. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive education for peace has left youth unable to actively participate in civic structures and political processes. Instead, an unrefined education system based on conflicting narratives has hindered the progress of transitional justice and reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> A study by Kostić found that this is due to the division of education policies and fragmentation in governmental institutions, revealing the state's weakness and perpetuating ethnonationalism in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, leading to collectivism among students<sup>12</sup>.

Critics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have raised concerns over the impact of international intervention in the country. They believe that the presence of international organizations has been too heavy-handed, impeding the country's sovereignty. They also argue that the response of these organizations to the conflict was slow and that their priorities were more focused on economic interests than on meeting the needs of the local population. Moreover, they believe that not enough has been done to encourage reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups, and that the international community's involvement has failed to bring about lasting peace and stability.

Differences between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine notwithstanding, this overview highlights the need for a well-developed and carefully implemented state policy in youth engagement during and after a war.

In conclusion, civil society and state actors strive to make youth be represented in political negotiations,

<sup>11</sup> Dženeta Karabegović (2017): *Aiming for transitional justice? Diaspora mobilisation for youth and education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, DOI:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1354165

<sup>12</sup> Kostić, Roland. 2005. "Education Movements, Power and Identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Education as Social Action*, edited by Ashok Swain, 52–74. London: Palgrave Macmillan

The Schüler Helfen Leben Office in Sarajevo, established in 1994, coordinates programs focusing on youth from Bosnia and Herzegovina, aged from 14 to 30, represented through four groups: (1) young people with no or minimum experience in civic engagement, (2) young people with experience in civic engagement, (3) young professionals and teachers, and (4) highly-active youth with significant experience in activism. Our methodology is based on raising awareness, non-formal experiential learning, mentoring & support, leadership development, small grant scheme, and networking opportunities, aimed at the empowerment of youth engagement and, consequently, the development of their communities.



transitional justice and reconstruction efforts for four reasons<sup>13</sup>:

- because they continue to be part in the conflicts and struggle.
- because they have the right to participate.
- they bring valuable knowledge and ideas to the table.
- long-term peace requires healing across generations.

Empowering both elite decision-makers and youth is crucial for promoting equitable distribution of power. This joint effort aims to achieve sustained peace and foster healing across generations.

## Conclusion

Considering the lessons learned from the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and SHL's engagement over the past 30 years, youth empowerment must be incorporated into post-war reconstruction efforts. Young people must be given the opportunity to participate actively in society, as opposed to being passive recipients of reforms that influence their lives. This can be achieved by ensuring access to quality education and providing resources and opportunities for young people to become leaders in their communities. Additionally, mentorship and guidance must be provided to ensure that young people have the support they need to reach their goals. Investing in the education and development of young people is not just a responsible step toward a brighter future, it is a necessary one.

A similar approach should be considered for Ukraine. It is crucial to launch initiatives and programs that focus on the country's youth, providing them with educational and financial support, as well as opportunities to engage in social activities and develop their skills. To ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, the involvement of

<sup>13</sup> McEvoy-Levy, S. (2014, September 30). *Youth and the challenges of 'post-conflict' peacebuilding*. UNICEF. Retrieved January 29, 2023, from <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/1067-youth-and-the-challenges-of-post-conflict-peacebuilding.html>

local governments and NGOs is imperative.

Youth empowerment is a critical issue that must be addressed in conflict and post-conflict societies. Schüler Helfen Leben's extensive involvement in this area in Bosnia and Herzegovina can serve as a model that should be taken into consideration for similar efforts in Ukraine.

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# The Power of Networks

## Interview with Annegret Wulff

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann



### Annegret Wulff

Annegret Wulff is executive board member of MitOst e.V. and CEO of Commit gGmbH. She has developed diverse programs supporting active citizenship and social cohesion in Europe and its neighboring countries. One of them is Theodor-Heuss-Kolleg program which was scaled in more than 20 countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Turkey, and Northern Africa. She has yearlong experience in building communities and networks as well as organizational development. Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine she coordinated the massive support of the MitOst network in Ukraine and initiated the Vidnova Fellowship Program for Civil Society Actors from and in Ukraine.

Although the Ukraine Solidarity Fund was MitOst's first fundraiser, more than 1.2 million euros were donated in a very short period of time. Using these funds, we have mainly helped in the humanitarian field: with evacuation, medical equipment, as well as protective equipment. Our local partners have also been involved in the evacuation and protection of works of art, and we have supported them financially. This war is also fighting against Ukrainian culture as such, so saving artworks from destruction is an incredibly important contribution. In addition to the actions on the ground in Ukraine, partners within our network are active in the border region in Poland, Moldova and Germany. They have taken in people who were forced to flee.

**Why were you able to react so quickly and effectively?** I can answer this question using two simple words: network and trust. MitOst is a large international network and we have been working closely with our Ukrainian partners for 20 years. This was the prerequisite for meaningful support. Also, it was beneficial for our fundraising campaign and our communication.

Our international network is based on long-standing partnerships and friendships and is therefore characterised by mutual trust. I believe that this trust was key to why we were able to respond so quickly.

On the one hand, we received the donations with a leap of faith. Our network trusted us to use the funds wisely where they are needed most. On the other hand, we trusted our Ukrainian partners to know what was needed at that point in time, and that they would do exactly that. This way of working, which required fewer consultations, was very effective in an emergency situation like this.

What is important to understand about Ukraine is that the country has an incredibly active and efficient civil society. Most aid to Ukraine still comes directly from within Ukraine. It is incredibly important to us that this remains so. That is also why we have given a lot into the hands of our local partners.

**What does MitOst now do on the ground? Are there any other plans?**

The aim of our work in Ukraine is to support civil society in a broader sense. At the beginning of the war, we observed how quickly support for artists, journalists and scientists was offered – which is great. However, we also saw a gap: there was no support for actors of civil society who were forced to flee. We firmly believe that civil society will play a central role in rebuilding Ukraine. If we do not support it now, there is a great risk that

On February 24, 2022, Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine began. As a result of this war, millions of people had to leave their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country or in exile. The war continues to this day. A lot of help and support for Ukraine comes from civil society organisations which have already had local networks and contacts.

Annegret Wulff is a board member of MitOst e.V. and managing director of the social enterprise „commit by MitOst“. In our interview, we talked about the MitOst Ukraine Solidarity Fund and how the network managed to react so quickly, what difference they could make on the ground and what is now important for the future of the people in Ukraine.

**How exactly did MitOst react? What did you do?**

We have been in close contact with our long-term partners in Ukraine since February 24, the first day of the invasion. We offer support where we can and where it is needed. We immediately launched a fundraising campaign and resorted to our international network to spread the campaign. Our communications team did a great job in the first weeks of the war. It was important for us to react and act immediately. So that political actors were also forced to take action. In 2013/2014, we saw Europe's limited reaction to the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of Luhansk and Donetsk territories. So, we were worried this would happen again. This attack is first and foremost an attack on Ukraine and the people of Ukraine, but it is also an attack on us – on our European values and our understanding of freedom and democracy.

neither in politics nor in society. Ukrainians themselves must speak and be heard, and we can support them in this. They need to have space to tell their stories. We should also continue to support them in retaining control. No one knows better what their country needs than the Ukrainians themselves. They now need support to be strong and prepared for the challenge of rebuilding their country.

flight and displacement will weaken existing structures. People who are forced to leave their communities due to their escapes have to make great efforts to rebuild a new network. Financial pressure can lead to well-educated actors of civil society taking on different jobs simply to make a living for their families. This is where we started with the Vidnova Fellowship Programme.

The fellowship holders received financial support for 6 to 12 months and have been affiliated with a local organisation in their new homes, where they could contribute by applying their skills. At first, Ukrainians who are in European exile were included into the programme. At the same time, our Ukrainian partner organisation Insha Osvita established a sister programme with the same objective for internally displaced people. This means that Ukrainians who had to leave their eastern hometowns to seek refuge in places further west are financially supported and connected to local organisations. If a return from abroad to Ukraine was planned and desired by one of our fellowship holders, then we also supported them by allowing them to switch into the programme in Ukraine.

We will continue to be active in Ukraine in the coming years and support our partners, because Russia must not win this war. In the near future, we will primarily contribute through networking. There are an infinite number of active and very efficient protagonists in Ukraine and in Europe – but we see a gap in the network between them. Since networking is our strength, this is where we want to get involved.

**Based on your experience and the knowledge of your local partners, what is important for the future of Ukraine?**

For the Ukrainians, it is now particularly important that this topic does not disappear from our agenda again –

MitOst connects active citizens in an open and diverse network in Europe and its neighbouring regions: MitOst enables activities and programmes which foster cultural exchange, active citizenship, social cohesion and sustainable urban and rural development – beyond cultural, sectoral or linguistic borders. As part of a growing European network, MitOst supports citizens in participating actively in their societies and in acting according to democratic principles. MitOst offers various tailor-made qualifications, motivating and empowering the participants and connect and support civil society actors who strengthen cohesion and agency in Europe and beyond, and encourage cross-sectoral cooperation in order to promote social innovation and sustainable urban and rural development. MitOst offers financial and professional support to our members and the alumni of international foundation programmes, helping them to bring their project ideas to life – such as exhibitions, campaigns in public spaces, performances, workshops, meetings and trainings. Members actively shape MitOst's strategic development.





# German-Ukrainian Civil Society Relations

## Opportunities and Challenges

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann

February 24, 2022 was a Thursday, and I had an appointment with my colleagues from CRISP e.V. for an after-work drink. But because Russia started its large-scale attack on Ukraine that day, we did not go out after all. Instead, we met at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, where people came together to show solidarity with Ukraine, or simply because they did not want to be left alone with their feelings at home. Since that day, as a Ukrainian, I have felt constant support from my international team in organising humanitarian aid, encouraging talks and joint projects. In this article, I will explain how we, as a relatively small non-profit association, are reacting to the widespread war in the midst of Europe and what developments we are observing.

As an association that is active both internationally and in Germany, we engage in topics such as conflict management, political education as well as inclusive and communicative processes. We have thoroughly thought about where we can best put our capacities and knowledge into practice. In so doing, we first organised a fundraising campaign and purchased protective vests that were not available in Ukraine. Even though we are not a humanitarian organisation, we can still help if, for example, Ukrainian organisations need partners in Germany who can provide a donation account or issue donation receipts. Seeing as we have three Ukrainians in our team, we organised online events in March where people could easily ask questions about Ukraine - that was the beginning of our commitment to the German-Ukrainian dialogue. We also help building up capacities for Ukrainian associations in Germany, teachers in Germany and Ukraine, and we provide a network for relevant actors.



**Kateryna Pavlova**

Kateryna Pavlova grew up in Ukraine, where she was active in school and student self-government.

In 2017, she completed her Masters in Cultural Diplomacy at Andrassy University Budapest and started a traineeship at CRISP e.V. in Berlin, where she now works as Senior Project Coordinator. Their focus topics are non-formal education for young people and adults, professionalisation of peacekeepers and dealing with narratives in conflict.

Similar to the refugee flow of 2015, large parts of German society reacted in a humanitarian and empathetic way to the newly arrived war refugees. Ultimately, the reception and arrival of the refugees could be managed thanks to the enormous commitment of civil society, be it in the search for accommodation and finding places for children at schools, in dealing with the authorities or even in offering psychological support. Volunteers who help refugees took over a large part of the work from the government. Often they were not prepared for these kind of tasks, which often led to frustration and conflict.

Thanks to the funding of the German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work, we were able to respond to this challenge by implementing a support programme for those who are helping refugees. So we received access to the communities. We were able to talk to both volunteers and people who received temporary protection in Germany and got to understand their needs better. We were able to respond to some of these needs directly, while others required more capacity and a strategic approach.

### Communication: Emotions

Often, friendly relationships between volunteers and refugees particularly develop in rural areas. It is a well-known fact that language barriers can make integration a more difficult affair. In 2022, Germany responded to this fact by increasing the number of language course offers.<sup>1</sup> Although some of them first ran without being recognised as integration courses. At the same time Germany shows a lot of interest in the Ukrainian language. According to the report of the free online language acquisition provider "Duolingo", the number of people who learn Ukrainian in Germany increased by 1651% in 2022<sup>2</sup>. Also, more Ukrainian language courses are offered at adult education centres or private language

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Statistik/Integrationskurszahlen/integrationskurszahlen-node.html>

<sup>2</sup> Duolingo Language Report 2022: <https://blog.duolingo.com/en/duolingo-language-report-2022-global-report/>

schools, which people can attend in person. The number of people who are interested in events concerning Ukraine is higher than ever in Germany. From my point of view, these developments can have very positive effects, since integration works as a „two-way street“, in the sense that both the newcomers and the receiving society open up. No heterogeneous society will function without mutual interest in living together and a shared appreciation for cultures.

The other challenge of German-Ukrainian communication is dealing with the war and the conflicting emotions that come with it.

Refugees tend to ignore the war in conversations with volunteers even if they are very concerned about it. The explanation for this seems to be not wanting to add any emotional distress. This often leads to misunderstandings in communication. The need for psychological support was expressed by both volunteers and refugees.

### Communication: Socio-Political

At the same time, we are observing how German solidarity with Ukraine is declining in parts. The number of protests against rising inflation and energy prices, sanctions against Russia and demands for a new deal with the aggressor are increasing, e.g. At the Monday demonstrations in Frankfurt (Oder) and Thuringia. Participants often claim not to be heard or seen by their government and tend to blame Ukrainians for current socio-political developments and threats to peace and security in Europe. Here, opinions of extremists partly blend in with those of the peace movement, as well as with the people who feel a general dissatisfaction with the political system or rather its representatives. The role of Russian and Russia-sponsored propaganda in these developments should not be underestimated.

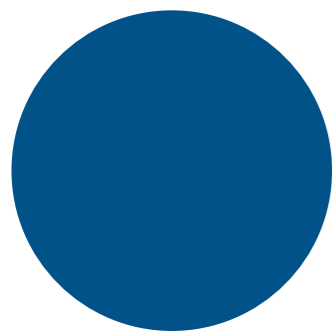
The need for measures against radicalisation, disinformation, neo-imperialism and for German-Ukrainian dialogue is growing every day. There is a need for inclusive dialogue formats that enable people of German and

„I'm not a certified German teacher, but the need to learn German was already high among the refugees from Syria. So I taught a language course in 2015/16. With this gained experience, we were able to start a language course for refugees from Ukraine in April 2022. The People who attend my weekly class have become good friends of mine. But we do not address the issue of war. I can see when they're sad or upset, but I don't ask them about it, because I don't want to be pushy. When I see myself confronted with too many requests from refugees, I seek help from other volunteers, but find it difficult to talk about my limits.”



**Melanie Cassel,  
Baddeckenstedt/  
Germany**

“I am a Ukrainian psychologist. I came to Germany in March 2022. Although my diploma is not yet recognised here, many refugees who need psychological support turn to me. They frequently worry about relatives in Ukraine. The topic of security is also widespread in Germany - there are cases of host families stealing money from the refugees' suitcases; punctured tires on cars with Ukrainian license plates; dubious cars that regularly stop at houses where refugee women with children reside. Some victims have contacted the police, but then have not pressed charges or investigated further, or there was miscommunication between the two parties due to the language barrier.”



**Anonymous**



Ukrainian origin to discuss socio-political issues openly. Such formats need to be organised very well, and everyone involved should display a high level of tolerance and awareness.

We organised such dialogue formats together with the [Alliance of Ukrainian Organizations](#), [Kyiv Talks](#) and [VOLT Germany](#) in a pub in Dresden. The panel discussion was followed up by a Q&A session. And although that worked out very well, experimenting with the format in future and making it more open would improve a mutual exchange of ideas.

It is important to include Ukrainian migrant self-organisations at events and publications relevant to Ukraine, true to the motto „Nothing for the target group without their participation“. Although there is a need to de-colonise debates, make them inclusive and hold them without the well-known concept of „Westsplaining“, events that analyse future scenarios of the Russian war in Ukraine, for example, often take place without experts from Ukraine. The explanation given for this could be, for example: „We can have a factual discussion with German experts that is not led by emotions“, by which statement the Ukrainian experts are fundamentally denied expertise and objectivity.

Migrant self-organisations – not only the Ukrainian ones – mostly work on a voluntary basis and need professionalisation. This is another field we need to work on in a multicultural society.

## Security

Since refugees from Ukraine oftentimes found shelter in private accommodations, their safety cannot be guaranteed so easily. Since 2015, protection concepts and security measures against violence have been developed based on the municipalities' respective needs and capacities. However, these concepts were developed for refugees who live in collective accommodations and therefore can react differently to existing risks (e.g. turning to security forces and receiving therapeutic services in the accommodations) compared to refugees who live in private accommodations. Even if security in collective accommodations remains a very complex issue with its own challenges, there is a need to expand the concepts to include private accommodations. In my view, it is

worth to ensure the following measures:

- Spreading information among newcomers about their options when they have become victims or witnesses of violence;
- Language mediators in the police sector;
- regular round tables on security with local decision makers and civil society;
- Engaging trained psychologists from Ukraine as consultants as long as their diplomas are not recognised.

It is crucial that the local administration and civil society jointly approach and cooperate in security-related issues. In times where solidarity with Ukraine experiences a setback it is especially important to keep an eye on security and act preventively.

## Educational Support

According to the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, more than 200,000 children and adolescents from Ukraine have been sent to school in Germany since 24 February 2022<sup>3</sup>. Each federal state has responded individually to that - with mixed welcome classes, classes with only teachers and students from Ukraine, direct integration into the regular classes, etc. Many children learn parallelly at the German and the Ukrainian school. This phenomenon remains widespread, despite the criticism that children are overwhelmed with this system. The students, their parents and teachers in Ukraine have given following reasons as to why that is:

- The families plan to return to Ukraine in the near future and are concerned that learning at a German school will not be recognised.
- The students feel disconnected from everything Ukrainian and have no opportunity to talk to people who share their attitude to the situation in Ukraine.
- Ukrainian children are often left out of the teaching programme until they have learned German. Children lose self-esteem and look for opportunities to get recognition.

Therefore, there is a need for programmes for refugee children, where they do not feel reduced to their language skills, but where they come into contact with children who have made similar refugee experiences and also feel homesick. It is important to involve teachers and civil society from Ukraine in such programmes, because there is a wide range of expertise for trauma-sensitive educa-

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kmk.org/dokumentation-statistik/statistik/schulstatistik/gefuechtete-kinderjugendliche-aus-der-ukraine.html>

“Some of my students are now in Germany, but we stay in touch, in the online school, as part of the projects of Ukrainian NGOs or informally. I often hear that they feel lonely and more mature compared to their German classmates. They can't talk about their experiences, don't want to, or can't trust new acquaintances. I think socio-pedagogical education projects could help them, but not those which aim to assimilate (of which I have heard), but projects that maintain the connection to Ukraine. I personally do not want Ukraine to lose its young people.”



**Nataliya  
Perschotrawensk,  
Ukraine**



**Karolina Daushvili, 13  
Gießen/Germany**

„It's great how much support we get from Germany. I came from Kharkiv with my mother in August 2022 and we were resettled to Giessen. Here, we have our own room, I go to school, Mom attends a language course. It's safe here, I can meet people, go for walks – I couldn't do that at home. I had to sit in the basement all the time. Here in Giessen, we have a club for Ukrainians, where board games are played every Thursday, and there are other great programmes for young people. It's a safe space for us, here I can talk to those who have had a similar experience, here I can converse in my native language and relax. It's important to have places like this one. I never thought that the war would break out, that I would live here and speak German, but that's how it is now. One day I'll study journalism in Spain, but first I will attend my graduation party in a peaceful Kharkiv, Ukraine. That will happen. I know it will.“

tional projects in Ukraine, which has been highly professionalised since the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2014.

It is also necessary to support German teachers in dealing with the subject of war in heterogeneous classes. Many find it challenging to respond to students' emotions and political statements, but also find it inappropriate to ignore or suppress them. Ukrainian teachers who have been recently employed or have worked for a long time at German schools have also taken on the role of conflict and psychological advisors for children from Ukraine, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova or Russia. Support for teachers in Germany in dealing with these challenges is needed urgently.

## Conclusions

Die Deutsch-ukrainische Beziehungen waren noch nie so iGerman-Ukrainian relations have never been as close as they are today. There is a saying “Berlin is the new Kyiv” because so many skilled Ukrainian employees have moved here. It is worth considering the expertise that

many representatives of Ukrainian civil society brought to Germany, especially their experience with interculturality and in dealing with the challenges of war. Since 2014, Ukrainian people – both in exile and in Ukraine – have experienced war in their homeland, and have acted accordingly by developing, applying and testing many approaches. Ukraine's vast experiences in digitalisation, modernising the educational system and intersectoral cooperation could also be relevant in supporting Germany's reform processes. As we fight together in this cruel war in the heart of Europe, both of our societies gain momentum from which they can emerge even stronger. In concrete terms, this means: inviting Ukrainian experts to Ukraine-related debates and forming partnerships with Ukrainian NGOs so that capacity building is also palpable in Germany. But above all, it also means listening before making statements about what Ukraine has to do and how. It is up to German civil society to recognise the momentum and not to miss it.

CRISP – Crisis Simulation for Peace e.V. particularly works in the two fields of civil conflict management and political education. Through its activities, CRISP promotes a critical transnational democratic culture in which diverse groups engage in constructive dialogue to resolve conflicts. CRISP has been working in and with Ukraine since 2014.



# Volunteering Together to Help

## Ukraine Funding Programme by the German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work (DSEE)

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann



Philipp Berg

Philipp Berg is officer for digitisation in organisational development at the German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work. He is interested in Free Software and topics related to Digital Sovereignty of Civil Society. In 2022, Philipp was project manager for the funding programme for Ukraine of the DSEE, „Volunteering together to help” (Ehrenamt hilft gemeinsam).

### Programme

Since February 24, 2022, the Russian war of aggression, which violates international law, has shown that peace and freedom in Europe are not to be taken for granted. Not even in the 21st century.

The consequences for the people in Ukraine are devastating. Germany has shown and is still showing great commitment through its active citizens, administration, and its business community. This commitment must be strengthened and acknowledged. The quick help upon arrival is just as significant as the integrating element of commitment and volunteering. Innovative, social, and often digital approaches are used to find solutions.

With the “Volunteering Together to Help” (Ehrenamt hilft gemeinsam) funding programme, DSEE has helped to strengthen civic engagement and volunteering in times of crisis and has established new structures or renewed existing ones. It was and still is important to recognise the achievements of voluntary work and to take into account that there is a need for it. The total package of the programme amounted to EUR 15 million. In each field of action, projects could be funded with up to EUR 50,000.

Funding of up to EUR 250,000 could be provided to organisations which functioned as distributors and passed

the entire funding on to other non-profit organisations.

The funding programme “Volunteering Together to Help” (Ehrenamt hilft gemeinsam) was divided into three action fields to showcase the wide range of civic engagement projects that have different structures and use different approaches.

**Action field A:**  
Strengthening commitment and volunteering structures to help refugees.

In action field A, the DSEE promoted engagement and volunteering structures for the benefit of refugees through new or further developed, innovative, social, or digital projects. In addition to that, action field A supported projects carried out in rural or structurally weak areas.

It was possible to fund projects in this field of action

that aimed to advise, support and mentor refugees on site and provide initial orientation as well as direct support to those seeking advice and assistance.

Within the scope of action field A, the necessary measures and projects of organisational development, such as measures for the development and expansion of the infrastructure for civic engagement and volunteering, were also eligible for funding. This included, among other things, the recruitment, placement and support of volunteers, qualification and consulting services, recognition of the importance of volunteering and communication measures.

**Action field B:**  
Creation or spread of social innovations along fields of action.

In action field B, the DSEE strengthened and the extended effective new or further developed innovative programmes for refugees from Ukraine (scale-up to new regional locations in Germany, expansion of the programmes to new target groups or further development through digitalisation), particularly in these following areas:

Health, recruitment and qualification or placement of volunteers, education and language acquisition, further education, mobility equipment, programmes for children and adolescents, accompanied visits to govern-



„Ehrenamt hilft gemeinsam“ - Ukraine Funding Programme by the German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work.

mental offices, labour market integration, mentoring and sponsorship, orientation, and information. Due to targeted, innovative integration services in the aforementioned fields, refugees were supported and engaged immediately upon arrival.

**Action field C:**  
**Supporting and strengthening aid networks with two or three sectors and initiatives aimed at helping refugees from Ukraine.**

Newly created aid networks should be promoted in order to establish local engagement structures that help diverse local actors to network and to create synergies. These support networks should be characterised by openness and the diversity of their members. At least two of these stakeholders were required to take part:

- Civil society
- Municipality (administration and policies)
- Business community

- Academics

This diversity should help to pool resources, broaden knowledge and to implement needs-based or innovative projects for refugees on site.

Refugees should be engaged effectively and sustainably in order to align networking with the needs of the target group in an agile, targeted manner.

### Implementation

Applying for funding was possible from 20 July 2022 to 1 September 2022.

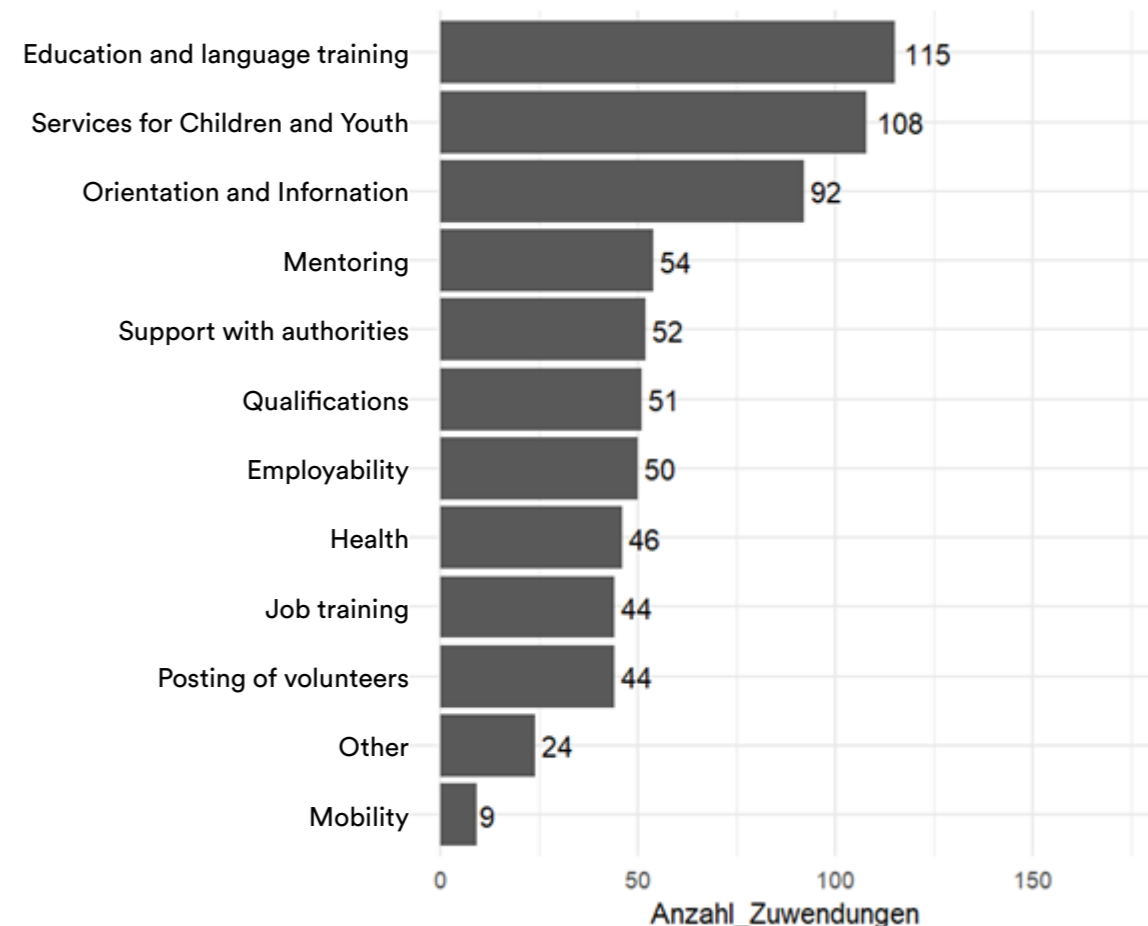
In a very short time, 532 organisations applied for funding. Of these, 460 applications were approved and received funding. The total package of subsidies exceeded EUR 14 million. Non-profit organisations from all federal states of Germany were funded.

Looking further into the action fields has revealed that there were and still are needs, especially with regard to



*Distribution of projects by postal code. Action field A in green, B in blue, C in red*

*Distribution of projects by topic*



programmes for children and adolescents, particularly in education and language acquisition. Education and childcare were often seen as a merged topic. This is why, for example, there were intents to launch programmes that would allow parents to attend German lessons while their children would be taken care of in day-care.

A distinctive feature of the programme was that a large proportion of migrants organizations was present. These organizations applied for a total of 102 projects that were approved. We want to emphasise the approach of sharing gained experiences from the refugee flows of 2015 with the refugees that are now coming from Ukraine, as it contributes particularly to social cohesion and to the integration of refugees. We were able to provide structures that were established in the light of the refugee flows of 2015.

Overall, the funding programme can be deemed a great success. At the same time, it gets clear how important commitment and volunteering are in times of crisis. Where the federal government, states, dis-

tricts, and municipalities reach their limits within established structures or a lack of funds and where they are unable to cope with the dynamics of the situation, a committed civil society never fails to selflessly take action for the community and constantly adapts to new challenges, even in times of multifaceted crises.

What people have achieved in recent months is impressive. To hold this standard of achievement, additional funding is crucial. We will continue to call for additional funds in order to provide a second funding programme. We all hope that this horrific war will end soon. Until then, we need the support of a committed civil society – and civil society needs support.

Millions of people in Germany volunteer. The German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work aims to support volunteers and their organisations and to improve the framework conditions. Since summer of 2020, we have been creating programmes that give volunteers fresh impetus and offer practical approach around volunteering-related questions in everyday life.

The German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work is supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.



DEUTSCHE STIFTUNG  
FÜR ENGAGEMENT  
UND EHRENAMT

# The Ukraine War on TikTok

## The Perspective of Peace Education

translated from German by Bianca Tosti and Jonas Zimmermann



**Cora Bieß**

Since 2019, Cora Bieß has been working at the Berghof Foundation in the field of peace education.

At present, she supervises the children's portal, [frieden-fragen.de](http://frieden-fragen.de). At the Center for Peace Research and Peace Education of the University of Klagenfurt, she is pursuing a PhD on the question of how conflict sensitivity can promote civil courage in order to strengthen children/ children's rights in online communication. At the International Center for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) of the University of Tübingen, she works as a research assistant in the project 'Safety for Children in the Digital World'.

### Introduction

With advancing structural changes caused by digitalisation, social media plays a central role in the communication about war. At the same time, social media turns into a platform of violent conflict and war. Changing dynamics of conflict, perspectives on war and its implications have become particularly visible since the beginning of the Ukraine war. Newspapers, such as The New York Times or The New Yorker, described the Ukraine war as the first "[TikTok War](#)". (Chaya 2022).

The following article will explain how the 'TikTok War' creates new opportunities for young people in the Ukraine war to share their perspectives. This includes being able to digitally articulate consequences of the war, their suffering and their fear of war in a realistic manner or creating new forms of mobilisation. Simultaneously, the 'TikTok War' also poses new challenges and risks, which are outlined in the following article from the perspective of peace education.

### Growing up in a Mediatised World

Due to social media and the spread of mobile devices, the internet has become an interconnected public sphere. As adolescents use the internet, interactions and spaces for dialogue are increasingly taking place virtually, and young people are increasingly being socialised online. Nowadays, adolescence is mediatised. At present, young people are no longer just consumers or recipients of media representations, they rather enter into dialogue themselves. They even open up or take

responsibility for spaces of dialogue. Structural changes caused by digitalisation enable new forms of interactive communication and dialogue. They create opportunities for young people to participate, network and blend in. Thanks to accelerated networking and the transmission of content within seconds, this interconnected public sphere thus offers new forms of mobilisation in which adolescents participate.

At the same time, however, structural changes caused by digitalisation also create new dynamics of conflict and forms of violence, which, according to Hofstetter (2021), produce new drivers of conflict. Both perpetrators' anonymity on the Internet and recipients' lack of visibility facilitate new violent incidents online. Furthermore, social media is characterised by a different time-space ratio, in which content can be distributed within seconds or content that has already been forgotten can suddenly reappear. What adds to this is the power of platform operators or the impact of bots and algorithm-based content, which can influence the representation of war on social media. In the analogue world, adolescents recognise when they cross boundaries with their behaviour because of the reaction of adults. In the digital world, however, adults are often not present. Hence social regulation by parents and guardians is weak. The lack of regulatory interaction between adults and children in online communication, for example, is one reason why adults often detect violence experienced by children in the digital world so late. According to the 2022 Index for Youth Media Protection (Brüggen et al. 2022), children from the age of 13 have better digital skills than their adult guardians. As a result, adults can not provide constructive support when adolescents experience violent situations in the digital world. The Index for Youth Media Protection by the Association for Voluntary Self-Regulation of Digital Media Service Providers (FSM) (Brüggen et al. 2022) also came to the conclusion that children talk little among themselves about the experienced violence in online communication.

Experiences of violence on the net can therefore lead to adolescents being restricted in their personal integrity and their potential for free development and growth. However, growing up in a non-violent environment and being able to deal with conflicts constructively, is essential for well-being, for building a peace-promoting future, as well as trust in society as a whole. The impact of the representations of war on social media is outlined below using the platform TikTok as an example.

### Why TikTok?

TikTok is now used in 141 countries in 39 languages with 1 billion users in 2022 (Statista). TikTok is therefore currently one of the largest and most relevant interconnected public spheres in the world. The great popularity of this platform is explained on the one hand by the emerging sense of community, on the other hand by the possibility of posting authentic content. Additionally, it is easy to use, and content can be edited without great effort. This platform is particularly popular with adolescents. TikTok is increasingly used for politicised communication, because everything "that politically affects the age group of users is reflected on TikTok" (Bösch/Köver 2021: 19). Thus, TikTok plays a crucial role in mobilising young people, making it an important platform in the digital world (ibid.: 5).

### What is TikTok?

TikTok is an online video platform operated by the Chinese company ByteDance. Originally, this platform became known for distributing short dance videos. The lip synchronisation function allows the users to create animated videos for entertainment purposes. In contrast to other platforms, TikTok has a special feature: users can remove the sound of the original video and replace it with alternative soundtracks using an audio feature. On

bution to the documentation of human rights violations.

### 3. Strengthening Young People's Perspectives

Several young people affected by the Ukraine war use TikTok for their reporting “as a kind of war diary” (Domdey/Pesci/Thiel 2022). Meanwhile, there is talk of so-called “WarTok careers”, as the example of Alina Volik illustrates (Bösch 2022). The young Ukrainian woman comes from Zaporizhzhia in the south of Ukraine. She posted about her experiences during the first weeks of the war. She was giving insights into how the war was changing her life, gaining “over 50,000 new followers on TikTok” (Grimberg 2022). Another example is the 20-year-old Valerie Shashenok (@valerisssh), who documents her everyday life in war, her escape, as well as her life in exile.

Until now, children's and young people's perspectives of wars were not only often overlooked (Liebel 2010), there were few platforms for participation or opportunities to articulate their opinions in public discourse. The use of smartphones can provide an opportunity for more participation of adolescents. Thus, the reporting of wartime experiences of young people can also increase empathy and compassion for them worldwide.

### 4. Enabling Global Peer-to-Peer Exchange

Using Tiktok as a war diary, peer-to-peer exchange among young people can be enabled. Across borders, young people can thus draw attention to changes in their lives during war. On social media, adolescents in other countries can show solidarity with young people in war, or get active by sharing their posts. As a result, young people as peace-makers can make political demands on behalf of their generation which are heard in public discourse. This happened before in other social movements such as Black Lives Matter or Fridays for Future (Bösch/Köver 2021: 5).

## Risks of Aggravating Conflict

At the same time, the “TikTok war” poses risks which can aggravate the conflict. They will be outlined below.

#### 1. Risk of (Re-Traumatisation)

acute stress reactions can occur when violent videos appear on TikTok without a trigger warning. Many depictions of war are currently circulating on TikTok without being put into context, showing explosions, destroyed cities, or armed soldiers engaged in acts of war. Such war content on TikTok often appears without warning

the one hand, this can lead to fun combinations of sound and video in the range of satire and parody, on the other hand, this feature offers low-threshold possibilities for manipulation (Reveland 09.03.2022).

## Peace-Promoting Potential through the Use of TikTok

The number of views of TikTok posts regarding Ukraine „has increased more than tenfold compared to the time before the war“ (Grimberg 2022). Various aspects can have peace-promoting effects in the „TikTok War“, which are outlined below.

#### 1. Mobilisation

By now, TikTok has become so influential in the Ukraine war that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called upon TikTok creators to help end the war (Grimberg 2022). Russian influencers which are critical of the Kremlin, such as activist Niki Prsohin, used TikTok in the first weeks of the war to take a stance against it (Grimberg 2022). TikTok can thus enable a broad and easy-access mobilisation of civil society.

#### 2. Documentation of War Crimes and Human Rights Violations

TikTok videos can potentially be used to document war crimes for future war tribunals if their authenticity can be verified. Reporting and documentation of war crimes are therefore no longer limited to war reporters, making reporting potentially more diverse and direct. War reporters cannot cover all places of conflict. By using smartphones, young people who are currently experiencing the Ukraine war could thus make an active contri-

“in between holiday pictures, dance videos and comedy” (Domdey/Pesci/Thiel 2022). This unfiltered visual reporting, therefore, poses the risk of (re-)traumatisation, or at least the risk of emotional disturbance, as fun content can switch to fearsome illustrations within a few seconds. An additional effect is conceivable: the increase in war content could lead to a normalisation of violence and war on social media, whereby violence and war are increasingly perceived as a ‚the norm‘, giving rise to non-intentional emotional ‚numbness‘.

#### 2. Disinformation

Russian state media, such as ‚Sputnik News‘, ‚Russia Today‘ or ‚RIA Novosti‘ use TikTok specifically to spread disinformation regarding the Ukraine war (Reveland 2022). For example, a study by the Institute for [Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#) states that TikTok is very important for Russian state media.

#### 3. Power of Platform Operators

Firstly, TikTok Russia blocked accounts which posted western and pro-Ukrainian perspectives on the Ukraine war. Further efforts have been made to impose censorship in war reporting, using the phenomenon of ‚shadow banning‘. In doing so, videos are „not deleted, but geographically confined and banned from the algorithmically curated feed which users see when they open the app. The result: Most app users never get to see them. Hashtags are suppressed in the search feature” (Bösch/Köver 2021: 8). Additionally, videos were banned on Russian territory: “An estimated 95 per cent of TikTok videos have simply disappeared from one day to the next for the Russian audience, which was observed by researchers from [tracking.exposed](#)” (Bösch 2022).

At the same time, a new phenomenon has emerged which [Tracking Exposed named ‚shadow promoting‘](#) (Grimberg 2022). It was revealed that “there actually was international content on Russian TikTok. Apparently, certain accounts were not suspended after all.” (Grimberg 2022). Indeed, the opposite was the case: It is even more bizarre that „TikTok even recommends certain content to Russian users which actually was banned before“ (ibid.).

#### 4. Lack of Support from Adults

As mentioned above, TikTok is particularly used by young people. So, there is a risk that adults do not even know how children and adolescents are currently exposed to representations of the Ukraine war on TikTok. Therefore, they can neither support them in a trauma-sensitive manner nor correct potential false reports and disinformation. Also, TikTok videos are very short,

which makes it more difficult to put them into context. Often, underlying interests and messages of particular videos are not clear.

## Conclusion: A Need to Take Action from the Perspective of Peace Education in Times of the TikTok War

As the various examples have shown, media communication, increasingly (in real time) on social media platforms such as TikTok, greatly influences the perception of war, violence, conflict but also peace. From the perspective of peace education, three different fields of action arise:

1. It is necessary to strengthen **peace knowledge** in relation to the media by raising awareness about the connections between media and war, violence, conflict and peace.
2. **digital peace skills** need to be developed. In doing so, peace education must provide a protected space for dialogue regarding the content children and young people see on TikTok, and in which way they are triggered by it. In this process, a safe framework should be created in which feelings and emotions can be expressed, and actions are taken sensitive to context and trauma. The aim of peace education should be to recognise adolescents' feelings of not being able to help or make an impact in times of war. Peace education should promote a feeling of self-efficacy, by allowing peace visions to be elaborated and formulated in a context-specific manner. In the context of German schools, discussions on how to make an individual impact as peace makers can take place. For example, talking about how incoming young refugees could successfully be integrated in their own school class, or how their own use of smartphones could strengthen peace-promoting activism across national borders.
3. **peace actions** online. Peace education should focus more on the question of individual media use. The role of fact-checking and media literacy is relevant in order to report fake news and propaganda about war to respective platforms, to block hatred and incitement and to stop content which glorifies war and violence from being forwarded. (Bieß/Bitan 2022: 40)



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- Welche Auswirkungen haben die Repräsentationen des Ukrainekriegs auf TikTok für Kinder und Jugendliche? [Podcast Folge 22 mit Cora Bieß: „Raw and Uncut – 11 Minuten Medienpädagogik“ der Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur](#)

The Berghof Foundation is a private and independent non-governmental organisation. It supports committed people, parties to conflicts and institutions in their efforts to create sustainable peace. The charitable organisation combines its experience and competences in the fields of peace research, peace education and peace promotion. The resulting activities are based on the guiding principle „creating space for Conflict Transformation“.



**Berghof Foundation**

# Lost or Golden?

## How Covid and the War Will Affect the Ukrainian Generation Z



**Oleksandr Podobrii**

Oleksandr Podobrii is an Ukrainian journalist, chief-editor of the Roma media platform Djanas. He studied at the Faculty of Journalism at Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv. Previously, he was deputy chief of the Ukrainian media outlet "Apostrophe" and chief-editor for "Novyny Live".

At any other times, Ukrainian children born in the early 2000s would have experienced the most carefree period of their lives. Usually, at this age, anxiety is about passing school exams and getting into college. However, life has taken a different turn.

Let's count it up:

The beginning of 2020 – a rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, for which there was no therapy at that time. This led to lockdowns, self-isolation, distance learning, cancellation of exams and proms.

Early 2022 – vaccines for COVID had already been found and more young people around the world seemed to return to their routine. But February 24 has changed everything tremendously for Ukrainian youth.

Nowadays, young boys and girls fear death not because of illness, but because of Russian missiles. Many of them have already left Ukraine, and it is unclear how many of them will return. The others who have remained are trying to get their lives together at home.

How do fear and chronic stress affect developing psyche and personalities? Has this generation to be considered "lost" for civil society? How does the war change all Ukrainian youth, and what do their Roma peers have to deal with?

### „There is a feeling that we are being isolated“

All along the 12 months of the war, Ukrainian sociologists have been doing monthly statistics on the mood and attitudes of the Ukrainian society. According to surveys of the "Rating" group and "Democratic initiatives" foundation, respondents aged 18-22 feel more exhausted and their anxiety level remains high.

Researchers explain that young people are not always sure what to expect from their future, and the lack of financial security, professional and life experience often make them worried.

According to representatives of Generation Z, they had not recovered from the Covid-pandemic and lockdowns yet when the war has begun.

"I have a feeling that we are being isolated all the time. Even some everyday things are perceived as something unusual. And when I read about students' life in Poland, I find it hard to believe that there is a life without missiles, strikes on heat and power plants, and tanks. However, we are already used to it and we can find joy in simple things," says Denys Podobrii, a 20-year-old student from Pereyaslav.

„The main thing that we lack is the quality of education. Remote activities have changed everything. How this education was provided is also a question. It took several months to get used to it, many people felt lazy, and it is difficult to get started over again. First due to Covid, and then the war made it even worse,“ Vladyslav Kuriach, a

21-year-old student at Kyiv National Economic University, explained to Djanas.

However, youth in today's situation have advantages: they are versatile in their thinking, less picky, and often look ahead with optimism:

"Periods of stress such as war or the pandemic tend to show true psychological resilience, especially among young people. Sometimes they are up to something that no one would expect from them. If we focus more on average cases, then I wouldn't talk about a 'lost generation'. On the contrary, we will have a generation that passed through the torments of war. Nothing can scare them in the future," explains Maryna Tkach, a volunteer psychologist of Djanas.

### „Due to the war, we realized that Ukraine is a truly powerful state“

An obvious experience from any Ukrainian election has been that young people are reluctant to vote. Often they



*Student Vladyslav Kuriach*

are still uninterested in politics, and many of the candidates seem old and distant to them.

However, there are exceptions, as were the presidential elections in 2019. This specific burst of interest can be explained by the factor of Zelenskyy's campaign that had become a big success among youth.

Afterwards, the interest has faded again, however, the war made a big difference.

When there is a threat of a missile strike, and when the neighboring state is using tanks to smash you, many are wondering „Why so?“. As a result, young people began to immerse in history and politics by listening to podcasts from bloggers, watching YouTube videos and those on TikTok.

The progress of Ukraine on the battlefield, the heroism of soldiers and society do not leave young people indifferent. And this will certainly play a crucial role in the future.

„Regarding the change in attitude towards the state, the war has brought awareness that Ukraine is not just a second-rate country, but a powerful state. Because of this, I have a bad attitude towards those who left, for me it's a betrayal,“ says Anna Kovalchuk, a 20-year-old student from Kyiv.

“Until I was 14, I did not like Russian culture and did not



Student Anna Kovalchuk

consider them as my brothers. I didn't really care about it. Now I'm wondering why all this is happening. I was never interested in politics - but now I'm more interested in history and willing to know. It's not like I'm being mean, but it's enough to understand that nothing has changed for Russia in the last 50 years,“ says Vladyslav Kuriach with confidence.

## And what about Roma youth? Facing same problems, but even more difficult.

In times of crises, Roma face even more difficulties than their peers. What was already a problem during the pandemic, continues because of the war. Roma youth is not separated or isolated from other Ukrainian peers, and therefore it faces the same problems, but with additional nuances.

Volodymyr Yakovenko, president of the ARCA, explained in a commentary of Djanas that most challenges account to the field of education.

“Those Roma youth who did not have access to smartphones or laptops, or constant access to the Internet - they could not properly pay attention to their studies. In addition, there are teachers who are not always able to pay enough attention to children in the classroom, and over the online lessons, the situation has become even worse. I cannot say that this is a lost generation, but in general, the Roma youth will roll back the issues of edu-



ARCA president Volodymyr Yakovenko

cation for some period. However, this is a problem not only for Roma youth, but also for all their peers“.

As other peers, the Roma youth are experiencing a great spiritual growth during the war:

“During the pandemic, Roma youth, began to think about existing problems and why they arose. Roma activists helped a lot with the settlements, created information campaigns, tried to disprove myths related to the coronavirus. You could say that a lot of this volunteer work was done by young people. I have often been involved in various campaigns that would help the community to survive these times and most of them came from initiative youth”, says Ruslana Polianska, a 23-year-old Roma journalist.

Many young Roma got even more active and involved in supporting their communities, despite many difficulties. Besides the problem of the quality of the education, our interviewer also highlighted a material aspect.

“Some young Roma still make a living by trading in the markets and have unofficial part-time jobs. In most Ukrainian cities, local authorities restricted the operation of markets, so people lost their only source of income in some places. During the covid period, only certain categories of the population were allowed to travel by transport, in order to travel it was necessary to show a certificate from the place of work (for example as it was in Zaporizhzhia), the lack of official employment limited young people in moving around the city”.

So, many young Roma are struggling with various problems at the moment. And like their entire generation, the war affects them in many ways.

## This generation should not become a „lost“ one. Only time can reveal.

The Ukrainian Facebook feed has long turned into an endless obituary. Dozens and hundreds of posts about heroes who died at the front - many of them are young people.

Bakhmut, Mariupol, Vuhledar and Soledar, Kharkiv and Kherson – the land is drenched in blood of young men and women who are giving everything for Ukraine's sake.

The Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports noted that 40% of youth in Ukraine were affected as a result of the Russian full-scale invasion:

“More than 2 million young people have become internally displaced and about 2 million have left the country. The damages on the objects of youth infrastructure amount to more than 3.4 million dollars. From February to today, the Russian occupiers have captured, destroyed or damaged 98 objects of youth infrastructure,“ the Deputy Minister shared with journalists at the end of the year.

The real figure is probably much higher - as research reveals and our young officials explain, almost everyone was affected. Even though people may not fully realize it yet.

Speaking of the lost generation, we remember the young men who were caught up into the torment of the First World War just after leaving their schools. Many of them never found themselves in post-war life. Can such a thing await Ukrainian youth?

“It is uneasy, but in the last one hundred years, the world has changed quite a bit. If we take notice of the

structure of the Ukrainian conscription, it becomes clear that the government is trying to mobilize more experienced people. Young people are not going to the front as massively as before. They face a difficult road back, but I'm sure, these young people will show their best“, explains volunteer psychologist Tkach of Djanes.

In addition, Ukrainian youth are experiencing some kind of a self-revolution - their moods and mindsets are changing, they are growing up faster.

“There was no clear unity until the war broke out. Only few people could answer the question of what they understand by the term “Ukrainian” or “Ukraine”. Now I've noticed that people in my surroundings, who were apolitical, react quite sharply to the Russian language. They are totally disgusted. and I feel the same way. Though in 2021 I didn't have any plans or goals at all, now it's different. I've figured out what is good and bad for me. The war has strengthened my spirit,“ says student Denys Podobrii.

Young people need both faith and the will to learn from making mistakes. Perhaps today's 20-year-olds will not become a „golden“ generation, but they will definitely not become a „lost“ one either.

Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture “ARCA” is a community-based Roma youth organization that has been working in the public sector of Ukraine since 2018. It is focusing its efforts on developing the Roma youth movement, supporting and preserving Roma history and culture, and building intercultural dialogue in Ukraine. Our goal is to create a positive presence of the Ukrainian Roma community by empowering its youth leaders, artistic talents and media activists. We are not proposing an exclusive Roma space but rather advocate the idea that we are Ukrainian Roma first and foremost, an integral part of the country's history and society.





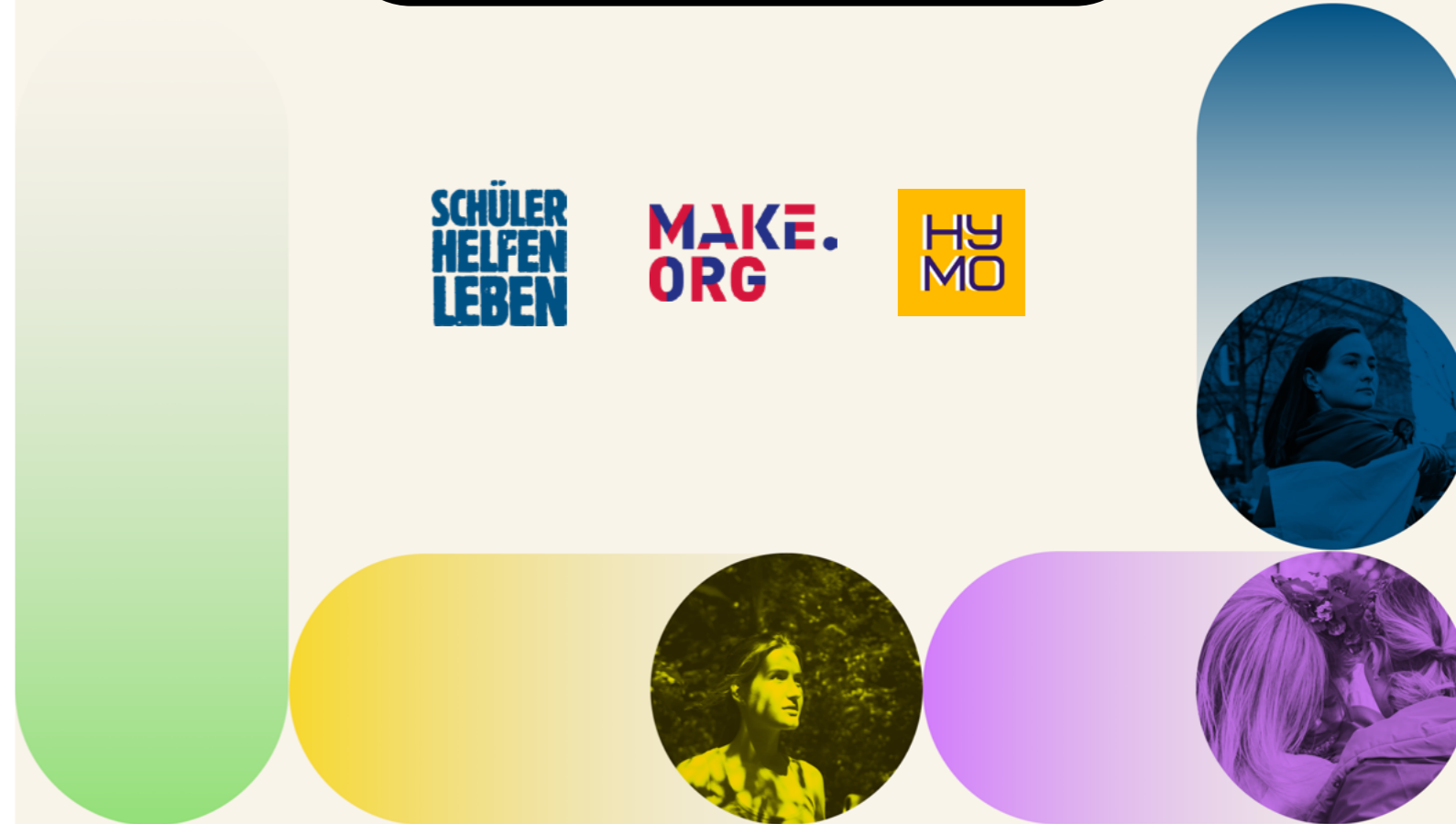
From 13 December 2022 to 07 February 2023

# UKRAINE'S FUTURE VOICES

**19,668**  
participants

**678**  
proposals

**276,734**  
votes



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# Editorial

# Ukraine's Future Voices

Providing a voice for the young generation of Ukraine in times of war – and advocating long-term support of their needs – these have been the main goals of the online consultation “Ukraine’s Future Voices”. It has been a remarkable success, involving nearly 20,000 young Ukrainians in imagining the future of their country. Despite the country’s dramatic situation, with the ongoing invasion and energy shortages, the initiative’s success highlights the resilience of young Ukrainians youth and their determination to play an active role in shaping their future. The consultation revealed a high level of consensus among the participants, with many common points and shared values. Furthermore, the results of the consultation were consistent with similar surveys conducted among young EU citizens, demonstrating that young people share common concerns, values and priorities.

A closer look at the results reveals several interesting insights. The top priority of modernizing the country’s educational system underlines a clear future orientation for young Ukrainians. Additionally, the participants showed a strong desire for Ukraine to become a well-functioning European state, indicating that corruption and compliance are issues that need to be addressed more effectively. Although stopping the war is a necessity, many participants went beyond the current dramatic situation and expressed hopes for a European future for Ukraine.

Economic prosperity emerged as a key topic, indicating that the future cannot be built on democratic ideals alone. Additionally, participants highly appreciated the idea of a welfare state supporting vulnerable groups. Unsurprisingly, the discussion of national identities was intense, with regard not only to Russia but also to legacies from the Soviet Union. Within this debate on the “future of the past” (Serhii Plokyh), national unity was promoted as a reaction to the war, with participants showing a proactive stance in promoting Ukrainian unity, culture and history. However, more restrictive measures like limiting the use of the Russian language were a controversial issue.

While conservative or illiberal ideas, such as opposition to LGBTQIA+ rights, the introduction of the death penalty, gun ownership and economic protectionism were visible, they did not receive majority support. However, we conclude that progressive (young) players will need to address these issues to align with the European standards that serve as benchmarks in many participants’ ideas. Additionally, the potential for civic commitment and participation seems to be mainly discussed in connection with leisure time or career development and, in the next years, more effort could be done to transform it in a key driver of democratic societies.

Moving on to the insights gathered from the consultation with young Ukrainians abroad, it is clear that these people are in the main comparing Ukrainian systems with those of other countries they are currently getting to know. This comparison has led to a desire to make Ukraine “more European”, which indicates a preference for Western-style democratic systems and values. Additionally, Ukrainians abroad have a particularly strong wish to counteract stereotypes and Russian influence/ disinformation in Western countries. This indicates a desire to present a positive image of Ukraine and ensure that others have an accurate understanding of the country’s culture, history and current situation.

The consultation revealed that young Ukrainians want to shape the future of their country. Not only does a clear majority seek to stay in or return to Ukraine, their ideas clearly indicate a desire to contribute to the country’s social and economic development after the war. For institutions and civil society players abroad, “Ukraine’s Future Voices” illustrates the support needed to make the aspirations of young people come true. We invite them to join and support the Ukrainian youth on their journey to a free European society.

**Schüler Helfen Leben**



**Sarah Delahaye**  
**Make.org**  
*Managing Director*

“This participatory initiative among young Ukrainians living in Ukraine and in EU was necessary. While the war has highly impacted their lives and their perspectives, it was essential to look to the future, to take into account their expectations and to respond to them. This online consultation allowed young Ukrainian citizens to be at the heart of the reflections on how to rebuild their future and the future of Ukraine. Their priorities provide a basis for concrete actions for civil society and institutions.”



**Yeva Tkachova**  
**Make.org**  
*Ukrainian coordinator of the project*

“For me, a Ukrainian student in Germany, it was extremely important to be part of a project that is working to spread the voices of Ukrainians. At a time when it seems that my contribution to the future of my country is minimal, being a part of “Ukraine’s Future Voices” was very special to me. I was extremely pleased to work with a team of people who worked so passionately and with great warmth on the project. I think that the results of the consultation reflect the fact that young Ukrainians are extremely motivated, desirous of change and ambitious about the future of our country and our world in general.”

“Within our projects for young people affected by the war in Ukraine, addressing their real needs and offering long-term support and perspectives for a peaceful, just and democratic future society is of utmost importance to us. The results of our wide-scale consultation among young Ukrainians will allow us to continue developing our projects to address their future goals, needs and wishes even better. We are happy to invite all stakeholders active in Ukraine to take their perspectives into account as well.”



**Patrick Hoemke,**  
**Schüler Helfen Leben**  
*Managing Director*

“When supporting those affected by the war, we must not lose sight of Ukrainian youth. The online consultation motivated almost 20,000 young people to share their visions and needs, far beyond the current emergency support. It is also up to the stakeholders from local to international level to listen to young voices, sharing their goals and ideas for a common future in peace and freedom.”



**Rebecca Fisch**  
**Schüler Helfen Leben**  
*Chairperson*

“Asking young people about their needs and hearing their opinions are the approaches that I and my colleagues from the National Ukrainian Youth Association use in our work, and on which we build our own projects. I would like this practice to be extended to all government institutions, so that thanks to this we jointly create youth policy in favour of a better future for young Ukrainians.”



**Veronika Diakovych**  
**National Ukrainian Youth Association**  
*Founder*





## 4 questions for Yuliya Bidenko

Dr Yuliya Bidenko has a Ph.D. in Political Science and is an Associate Professor at Karazin Kharkiv University, where she teaches courses on democracy, civil society, media and politics. She does a lot of work with the Ukrainian third sector as an expert and trainer, particularly as a member of the “Team Europe” initiative of the EU Delegation to Ukraine and as a trainer for the EU-Study Days projects. Dr Bidenko is a co-founder of the NGO “Association of the Civic Educators”, which promotes education for democracy and works together with the IFES-Ukraine, serving as a regional coordinator for the National Platform for Resilience and Cohesion. In December 2022, she joined the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS-Berlin) as a visiting researcher.

### Almost 20,000 participants, 678 proposals and 276,734 votes on the priorities and expectations of young Ukrainians for their future. How do you interpret the success of the "Ukraine's Future Voices" consultation?

Y.B. : After the full-scale invasion, civic awareness, participation and volunteerism among youth significantly increased as confirmed by numerous surveys and as I saw, as a Kharkiv University professor, in the example of my students. The war affected almost every family and made Ukrainian youth more mature and responsible. They became more supportive of each other and often channeled their energy into actions to address the problems in their communities. Also, the whole political culture and public consciousness in Ukraine are under transformation now, so it is no wonder that youngsters are reconsidering themselves as citizens and readjusting the visions of the society they want to live in.

But to be fair, there were preconditions for the youth activation: there was pretty liberal legislation stimulating NGOs' registration and activities in general, and young people were welcome to join public consultations: at both local and governmental levels. With the decentralization that took place from 2015 to 2020, almost every Ukrainian city launched advisory bodies or youth councils, and with the reform of higher education in 2014 universities were obliged to develop students' self-government and include them in the decision-making process.

### The first topic spontaneously raised by young Ukrainians is modernizing the education system. Are you surprised by these priorities?

Y.B. : Not at all. In any broad public consultations, people will try to initiate solutions in which they are stakeholders. For Ukrainian youth, education is definitely the sphere in which they have the most experience and interest. The war has compounded problems that education faced during the Covid pandemic; typical challenges of online education were exacerbated by the energy and Internet outages, some teachers and students were under occupation and massive displacement

obstructed education activities. Numerous Ukrainian students enrolled in programmes abroad, primarily in the EU, which led them to raise questions and develop proposals regarding their domestic schools and universities. I also believe that young people coming through this transformative experience reassessed the value of education and now have a clearer understanding of its potential role in the post-war Ukrainian recovery.

### Among the common factors of the proposals made by young Ukrainians, there is also a demand for more promotion of Ukrainian culture in response to Russian influence. How can this be translated into practice?

During the last year, a lot of people both in Ukraine and in the EU have understood the power of values and culture as a factor of social cohesion and resilience. I think young people could be the best promoters of Ukrainian culture abroad: they are free from the USSR nostalgia. They prefer contemporary music and arts and thus could make the world more familiar with the other

side of Ukraine: a nation that is energetic and free. I suppose that these proposals were also caused by the concerns that cultural industries have been underfunded in Ukraine these last decades in the contrast to Russia, where huge budgets were allocated to cultural and media production and spreading its narratives domestically and overseas.

### The Citizens' Agenda drawn from this consultation is now on the table of policy-makers and civil society players. What should they do with it?

My main advice here would be to listen to Ukrainians and take young people seriously. When talking about the post-war Ukrainian recovery, I always argue that this process cannot be efficient and comprehensive without being inclusive and welcoming different voices and inputs. Sometimes politicians are distant from young people, perceiving this group as dreamers,

lacking in experience and rational thinking. But you can't win a war without dreaming of peace and bravely projecting the future of the country you will rebuild. ■

# The citizens' consultation

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated once again that our democracies must be defended with stronger and more diversified means. Beyond the emergency in times of war, it is essential to look to the future. To do so, Ukrainian citizens must be at the heart of the reflections on how to rebuild their future. This counts especially for those who have all their future ahead of them: young people.

Young people and children face a particularly uncertain future in wartime: their education, jobs, families and friends are severely affected. If we are to overcome the medium- and long-term consequences of the war, the younger generation must not be forgotten. The wishes, needs and commitment of young people will be decisive for a future of peace and democracy. If we want to support the people of Ukraine beyond emergency aid, we must listen to the younger Ukrainian generation.

That is why the Foundation Schüler Helfen Leben, a youth-led organisation that has been supporting young people in war and post-war situations for almost 30 years, launched the initiative “Ukraine’s Future Voices” with the participatory online platform of Make.org, in partnership with the National Ukrainian Youth Association. Addressing young Ukrainians, this online consultation aimed to allow thousands of young Ukrainians, whether in Ukraine or refugees in Europe, to make their voices heard, regarding their priorities, their expectations and their wishes for their own future and that of their country.

From 13 December 2022 to 7 February 2023, almost 20,000 young Ukrainians were able to express themselves by answering the question “Young Ukrainians: How can you be helped to build your future?” on [ukraine-future.make.org](https://ukraine-future.make.org), by sharing their ideas and reacting to those of other participants. Their votes and proposals were analysed by Make.org sociologists who thus identified consensual and priority solutions favoured by young Ukrainians, as well as subjects that divided the participants. These ideas, gathered in the form of a “Citizens’ Agenda”, will allow political decision-makers and civil society players to orient their actions in favour of these priorities, and will allow all young Ukrainians to be players in defining their future and the reconstruction of the country.

The question asked:

## Young Ukrainians: How can you be helped to build your future?

19,668

**participants**

678

**proposals**

276,734

**votes**

# What young Ukrainians are talking about

*Educational system, institutions and democracy, justice and security, economy and employment, health and well-being...* These are the main topics addressed by the participants. 678 proposals\* were collected on the Make.org platform.

The following graph represents the weight of these proposals: it reflects what the young Ukrainians spoke most about in this consultation, their concerns, the topics of their conversations and debates.

This graph does not take into account the votes of the participants. This explains why it is different from *the Citizens' Agenda*, which is instead based on the ideas, prioritized thanks to the votes of the participants.

The most popular topic is the *educational system*, featuring in almost half of the proposals.

This theme deals with the desire to modernize the educational system, reduce the workload and add new disciplines that can be useful in everyday life, such as psychology, sex education, politics, etc.

The *institutions and democracy* topic addresses the functioning of institutions, their transparency and the integrity of political authorities. The conditions of the right to vote are also mentioned.

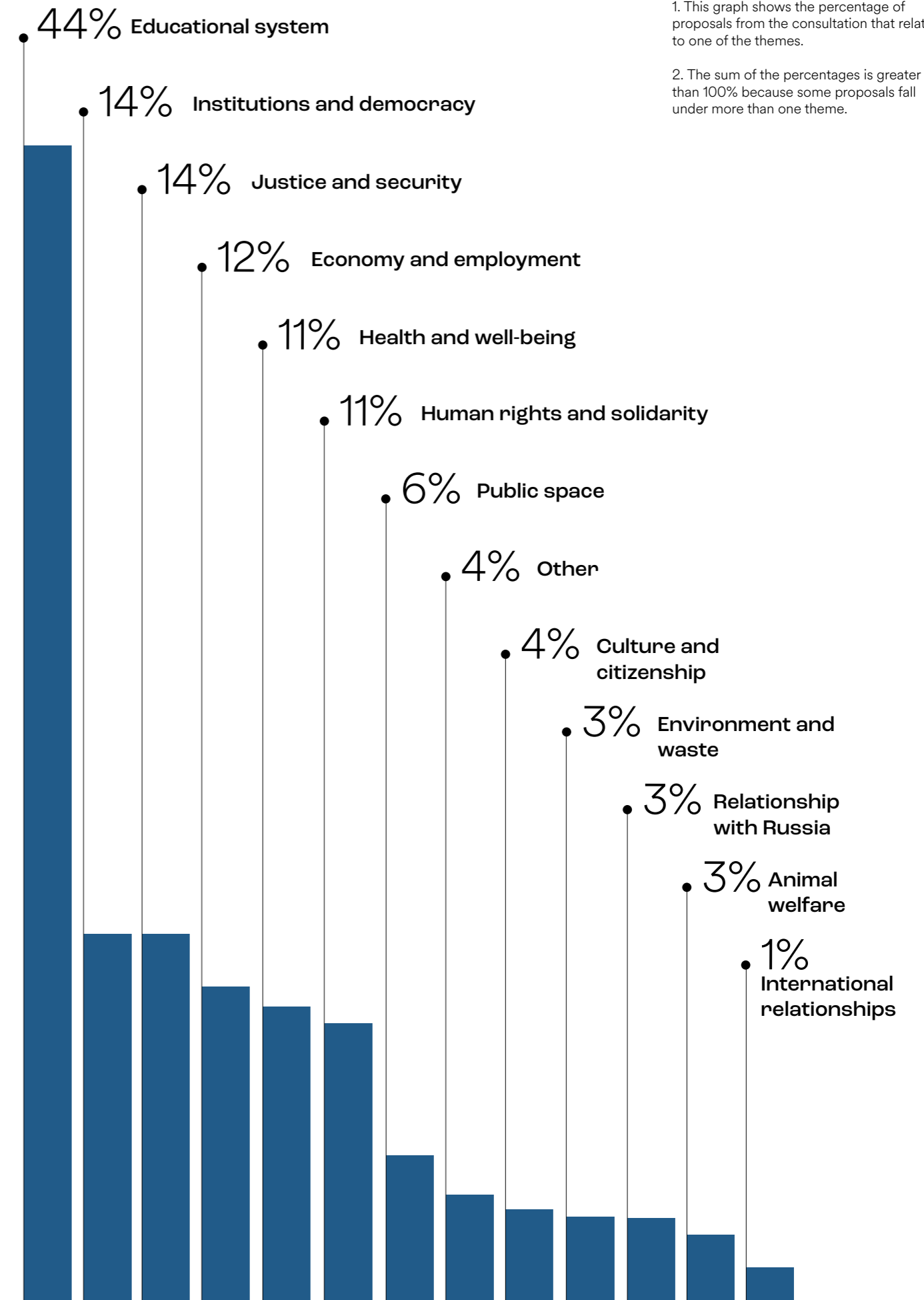
The *justice and security* topic addresses the common desire to improve the fight against corruption in Ukraine as well as more controversial issues such as gun ownership.

In the *economy and employment* topic, we find the aspiration to support initiatives for the professional insertion of young people and a more general desire to increase the purchasing power of Ukrainian citizens.

The *health and well-being* topic proposals focus on the need to improve the healthcare system, with particular attention being paid to mental health care, while the proposals on *human rights and solidarity* address the fight against violence and assistance for the most vulnerable groups.

In all other topics, the participants of the consultation call for the strengthening of legislation against cruelty to animals, a redefinition of public spaces, greater promotion of Ukrainian culture, especially to control Russian influence in the country, etc.

\*Out of 678 proposals submitted, 552 were validated by the Make.org moderators (see "Methodology").



# The Citizens' Agenda

## The most popular ideas ♥ and the controversial topics ⚡

### Education

- ♥ Modernizing the education system
- ♥ Simplifying the learning process and reducing the school workload
- ♥ Improving teachers' professionalism

### Health and social welfare

- ♥ Strengthening the healthcare system, especially in the mental health field
- ♥ Ending animal cruelty and suffering
- ♥ Providing social and financial resources to vulnerable groups
- ♥ Combatting violence and harassment

### Environment and public spaces

- ♥ Redefining and securing the public spaces
- ♥ Responding to the environmental crisis
- ♥ Improving youth sports and recreational infrastructure

### Economy and employment

- ♥ Supporting initiatives for youth employment and entrepreneurship development
- ♥ Increasing citizens' purchasing power
- ♥ Improving career development for students

### Culture and identity

- ♥ Promoting Ukrainian culture in response to Russian influence
- ⚡ Strongly limiting Russian cultural and linguistic influence

### Institutions and democracy

- ♥ Reforming democratic institutions
- ♥ Accelerating the accession to the EU
- ⚡ Conditioning the right to vote
- ⚡ Legalizing same-sex marriage

### Justice and security

- ♥ Strengthening the fight against corruption
- ♥ Strengthening the military defence
- ⚡ Facilitating gun ownership
- ⚡ Introducing the death penalty

# 01 Education

## Popular Ideas

1. Modernizing the education system
2. Simplifying the learning process and reducing the school workload
3. Improving teachers' professionalism

♥ Popular idea 01

# Modernizing the education system

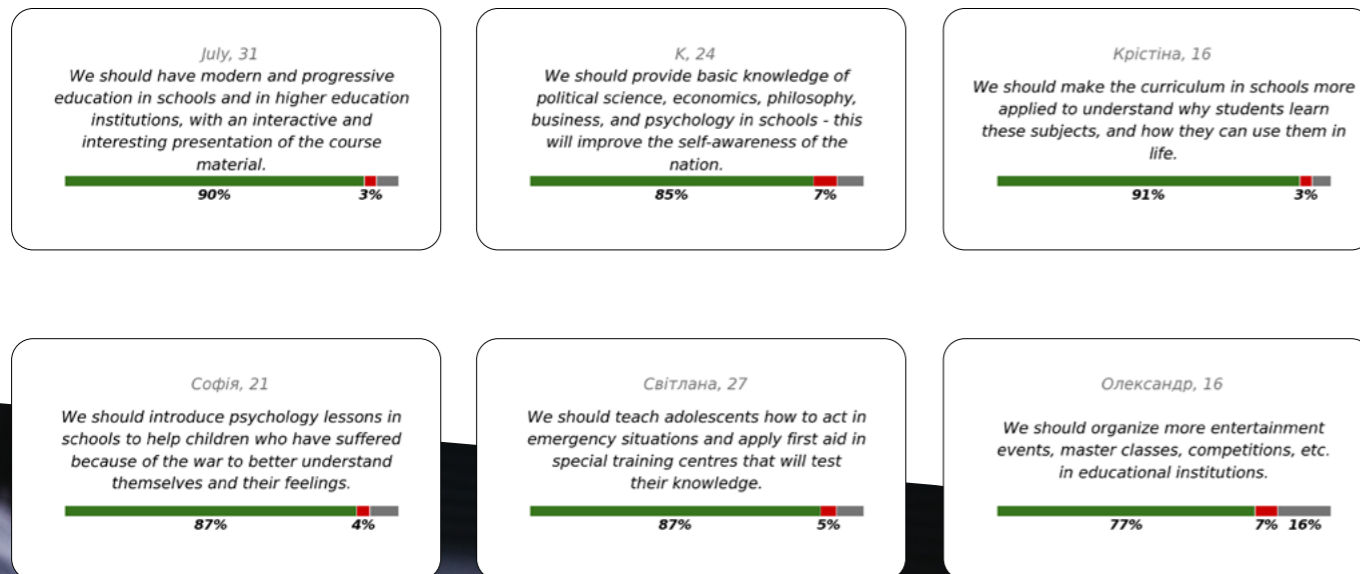
85 proposals 80% of votes in favour on average

The participants suggest a modernization of the education system in schools and higher-education institutions in Ukraine.

The focus is on introducing new subjects that could be useful in real-life situations, such as financial literacy, psychology, basic sex education, self-development and politics, to prepare young students for everyday challenges.

The education system should be made more modern, interactive and interesting. The proposals also call for removing subjects that seem not to be needed in real life.

## Proposal examples



♥ Popular idea 02

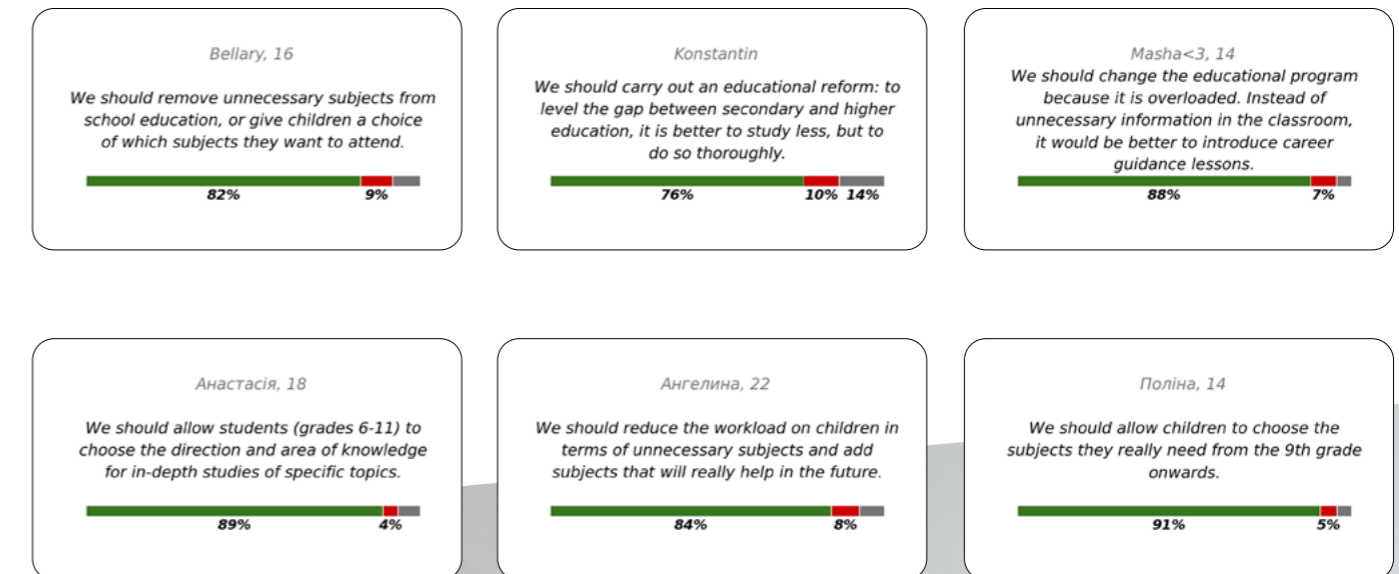
# Simplifying the learning process and reducing the school workload

40 proposals 74% of votes in favour on average

The proposals suggest reducing the workload, making the programmes easier, and simplifying subjects like mathematics. Additionally, the proposals suggest that schools should reduce the number of lessons and set less homework.

According to participants, it is necessary to reform the education system by giving students the opportunity to choose the subjects they want to study and their field of knowledge.

## Proposal examples



♥ Popular idea 03

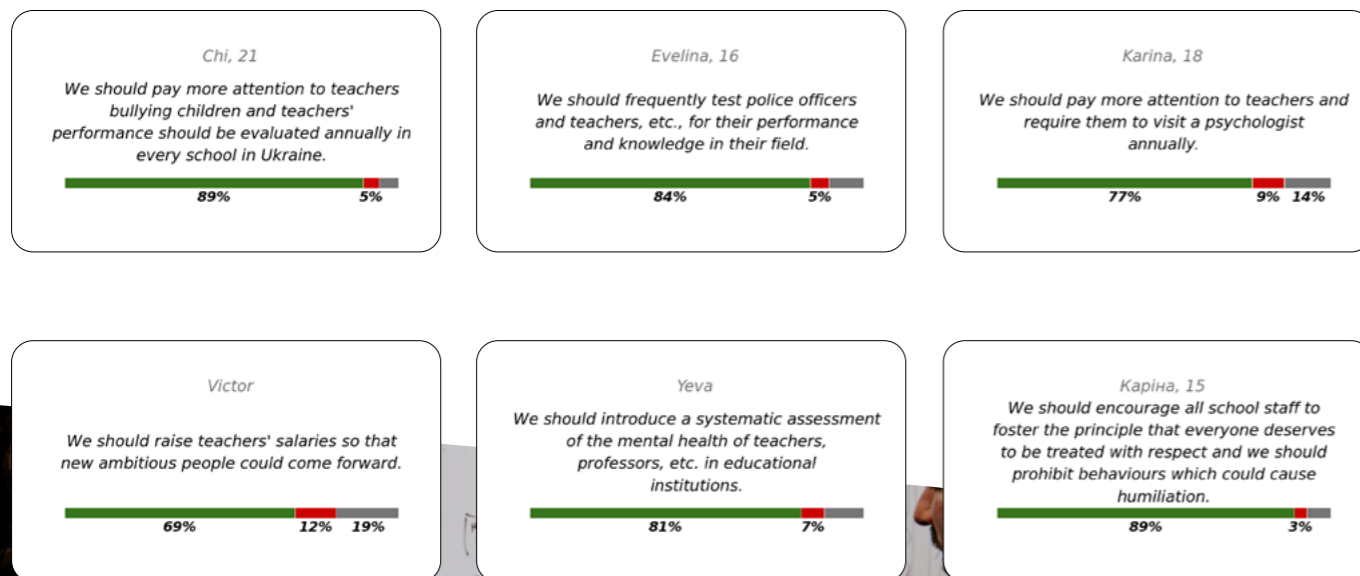
## Improving teachers' professionalism

19 proposals 78% of votes in favour on average

The proposals call for improving the overall conditions of students in educational institutions. This includes improving teacher-student relationships. Releasing teachers who are unable to behave professionally with students, enforcing respect for students by all school staff, and conducting frequent evaluations of teachers and other staff.

Additionally, the proposals also suggest improving the overall conditions of teachers: raising their wages, providing them with psychological assistance, and improving their overall mental health.

### Proposal examples



*We should pay more attention to teachers, to oblige them to visit a psychologist annually.*

Karina, 18



# 02 Health and Social Welfare

## Popular Ideas

1. Strengthening the healthcare system, especially in the mental health field
2. Combatting violence and harassment
3. Providing social and financial resources to vulnerable groups
4. Ending animal cruelty and suffering



♥ Popular idea 01

# Strengthening the healthcare system, especially in the mental health field

25 proposals 81% of votes in favour on average

The proposals aim to improve the quality of health care in hospitals and schools by promoting the use of modern equipment, checking the quality of medical practices and evaluating doctors. The goal is to ensure that patients receive high-quality medical care from qualified professionals.

Additionally, the proposals aim to create a more supportive and accessible system of mental health care for all. They call for improvements in the field of psychological health in several areas, including: providing free psychological rehabilitation for war veterans, introducing mental health certification for teachers, raising awareness and reducing stigma around mental health and psychological support, improving the qualifications and training of psychological specialists, providing psychological support in schools and universities.

Participants also suggest improving awareness about the topic of HIV and AIDS among both children and adults in Ukraine, as well as encouraging people to get tested for HIV regularly.

## Proposal examples

<p><i>Evelina, 16</i></p> <p>We should have school psychologists provide counselling for children in high school.</p> <p>80% 9% 11%</p>	<p><i>Konstantin</i></p> <p>We should provide free psychological rehabilitation to war veterans.</p> <p>94% 1%</p>	<p><i>Yeva</i></p> <p>We should do more to encourage people to get systematic HIV testing and provide free tests in all/most healthcare facilities.</p> <p>79% 4% 17%</p>
<p><i>Анна</i></p> <p>We should make sure that every child can get a counselling session with a psychologist for adolescents because school psychologists are useless.</p> <p>84% 5%</p>	<p><i>Владислав</i></p> <p>We should check and inspect hospitals and doctors for the quality of their work. There are many old doctors who do not care about their patients.</p> <p>84% 5%</p>	<p><i>Елліот, 19</i></p> <p>We should improve the conditions of hospitals and the equipment of state medical institutions. Promote the availability of modern equipment for better treatment.</p> <p>96% 1%</p>



♥ Popular idea 02

# Combatting violence and harassment

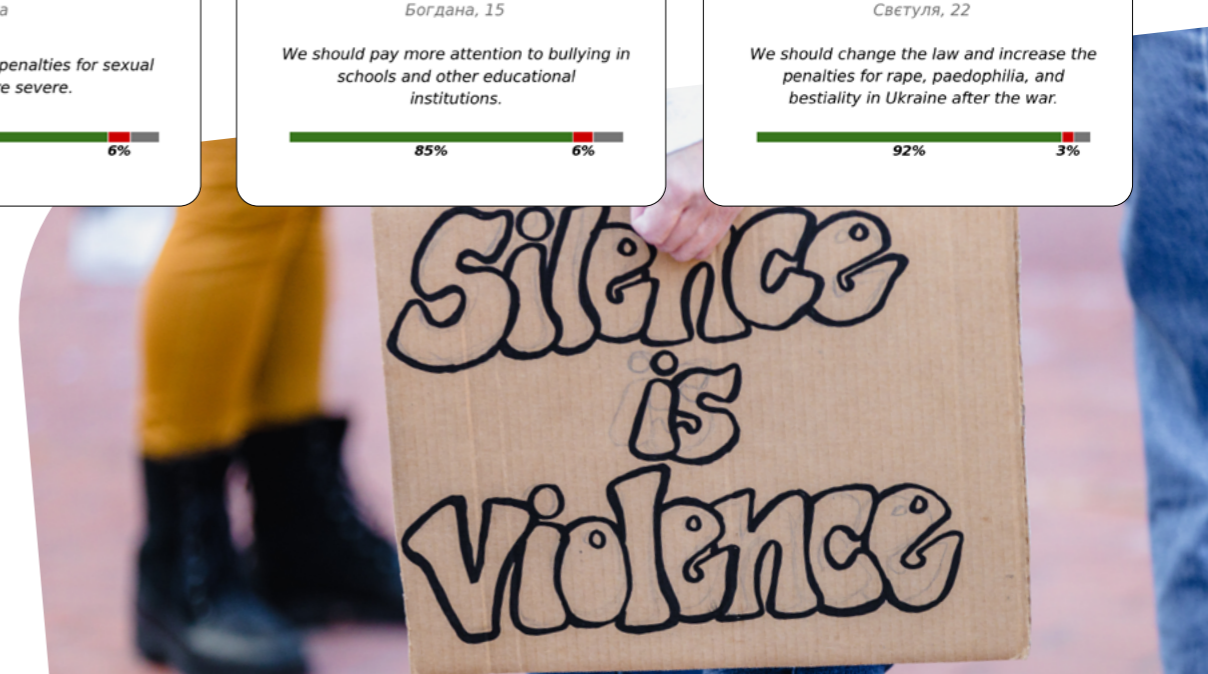
19 proposals 79% of votes in favour on average

The proposals focus on improving the handling of violence against and harassment of children and women in Ukraine.

Suggestions include: improving law-enforcement agencies, increasing punishment for violence and sexual crimes, creating shelters and hotlines for victims of domestic violence, introducing a register of perpetrators of sexual crimes, launching state campaigns to raise awareness about violence and its consequences, and combatting harassment in educational institutions.

## Proposal examples

<p><i>Akre, 31</i></p> <p>We should increase penalties for domestic violence.</p> <p>85% 5%</p>	<p><i>Sunmi, 22</i></p> <p>We should pay more attention to problems of psychological violence against children and help solve this through the state and law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>84% 7%</p>	<p><i>Yeva</i></p> <p>We should introduce state campaigns that would better highlight the issue of violence against children and the consequences of violence, and actively combat it.</p> <p>86% 4%</p>
<p><i>Yeva</i></p> <p>We should make the penalties for sexual crimes more severe.</p> <p>85% 6%</p>	<p><i>Богдана, 15</i></p> <p>We should pay more attention to bullying in schools and other educational institutions.</p> <p>85% 6%</p>	<p><i>Светуля, 22</i></p> <p>We should change the law and increase the penalties for rape, paedophilia, and bestiality in Ukraine after the war.</p> <p>92% 3%</p>



♥ Popular idea 03

# Providing social and financial resources for vulnerable groups

16 proposals 75% of votes in favour on average

The proposed initiatives aim to address the social and economic needs of the Ukrainian population, particularly the most vulnerable groups such as homeless people, IDPs, women who have lost their husbands and children.

The measures include creating funds and resources to help the homeless, repair dormitories and increase social payments for children and offer language courses and scholarship programmes to IDPs.

## Proposal examples



♥ Popular idea 04

# Ending animal cruelty and suffering

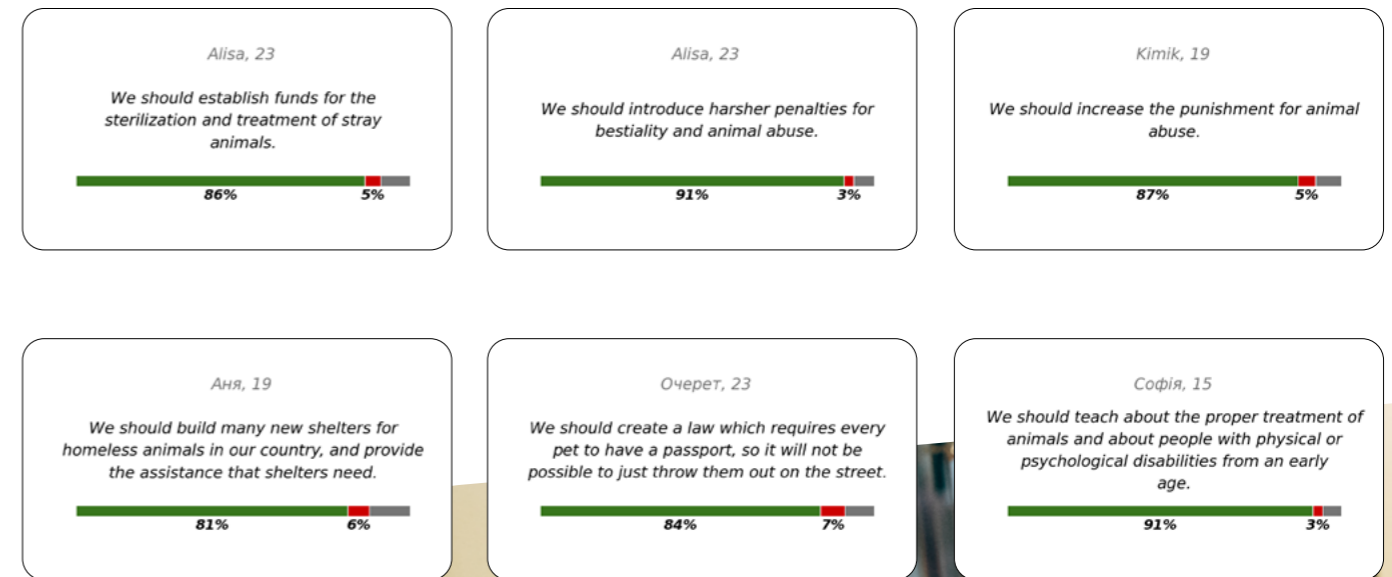
13 proposals 81% of votes in favour on average

Participants agree on the need to educate people about animal welfare in order to protect animals from abuse and neglect.

They suggest building many new shelters for homeless animals in the country and to provide the necessary help and resources to keep these shelters running.

They also suggest to increasing the severity of punishments for crimes against animals.

## Proposal examples





# 03 Environment and public spaces

## Popular Ideas

1. Redefining and securing public spaces
2. Responding to the environmental crisis
3. Improving youth sports and recreational infrastructure

♥ Popular idea 01

# Redefining and securing public spaces

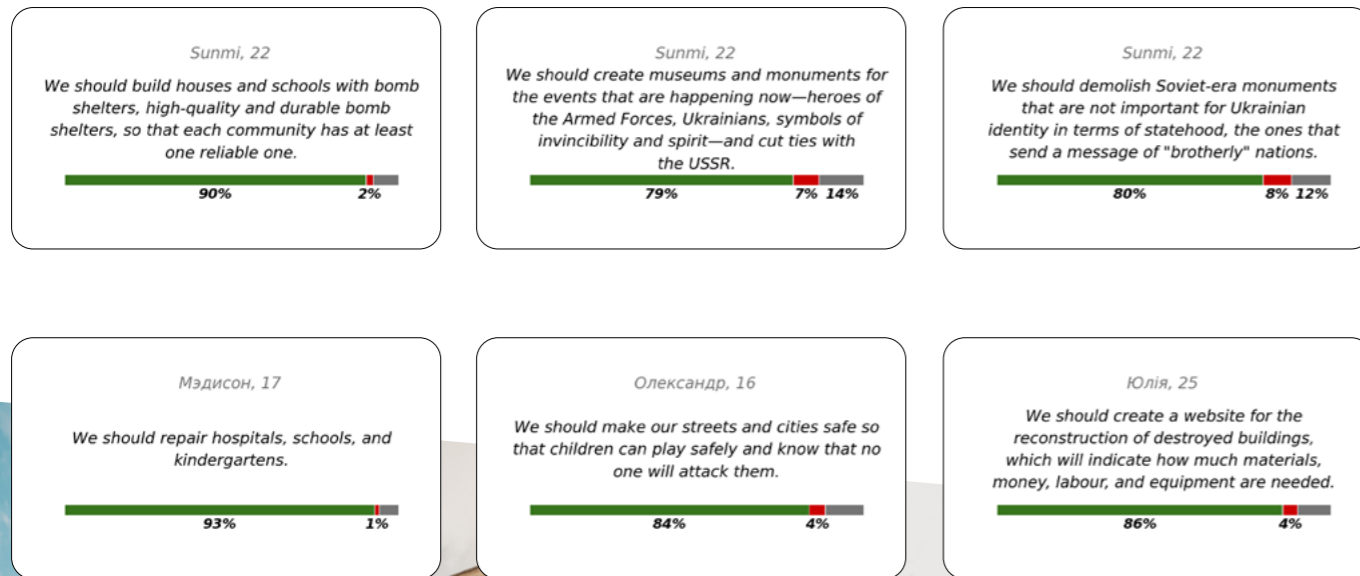
19 proposals 78% of votes in favour on average

Our participants seek to restore public spaces, rebuild destroyed buildings and make streets and cities safe.

Proposals also emphasize the importance of building monuments and museums that commemorate current events, heroes of the Armed Forces and Ukrainian people, as well as symbols of determination and spirit. Additionally, they imply a desire to remove monuments from the Soviet Union era that are not aligned with the new Ukrainian identity.

Proposals also include building bomb shelters in homes and schools for safety, providing schools with new equipment, protecting architectural monuments and building schools and kindergartens with basements.

## Proposal examples



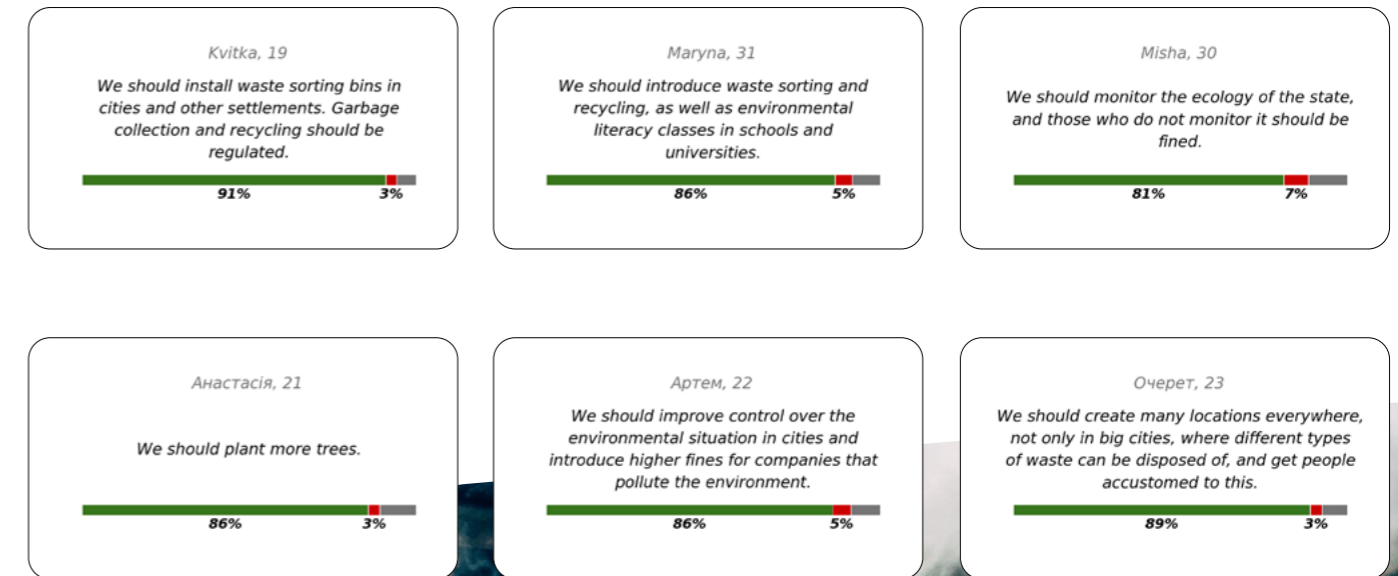
♥ Popular idea 02

# Responding to the environmental crisis

17 proposals 87% of votes in favour on average

The emphasis is on creating a culture of environmental responsibility and actively protecting the environment by improving waste sorting facilities, planting more trees, increasing fines for littering and for companies that pollute and improving environmental monitoring.

## Proposal examples



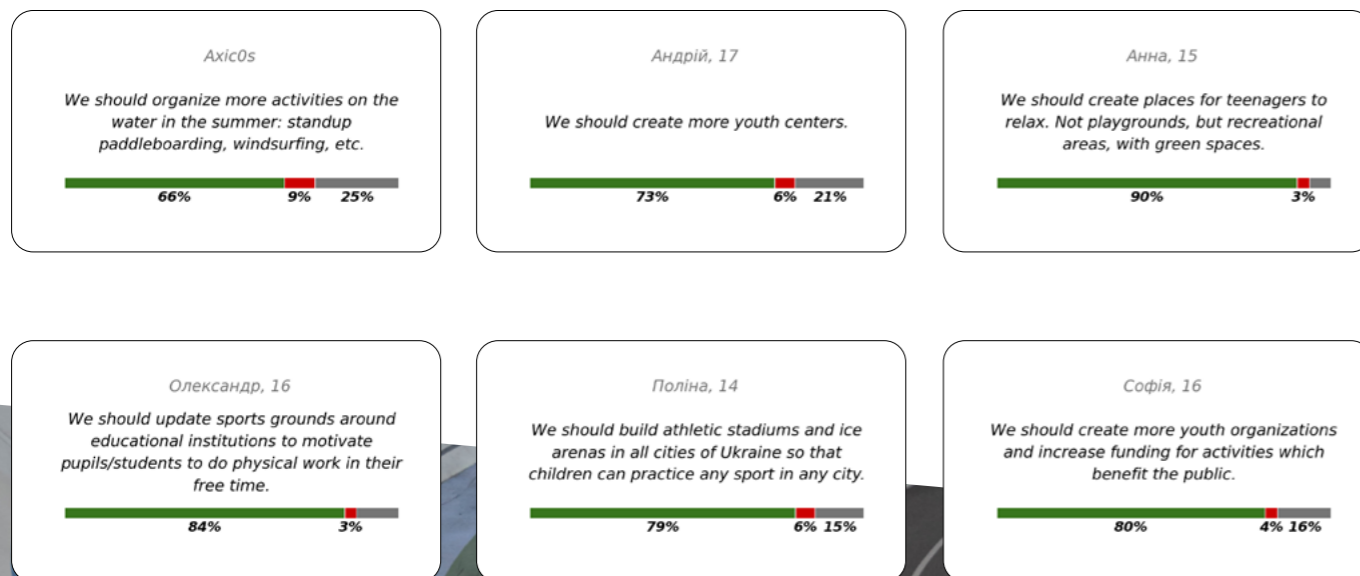
♥ Popular idea 03

## Improving youth sports and recreational infrastructure

6 proposals 79% of votes in favour on average

Participants agree to provide more opportunities for young people to engage in physical activities and leisure time through updated sports grounds, new youth centres and sports arenas.

### Proposal examples



*We should create places for teenagers to relax. Not playgrounds, but recreational areas, with green spaces.*

Анна, 15



# 04 Economy and employment

## Popular Ideas

1. Supporting initiatives for youth employment and entrepreneurship development
2. Increasing citizens' purchasing power
3. Improving career development for students

♥ Popular idea 01

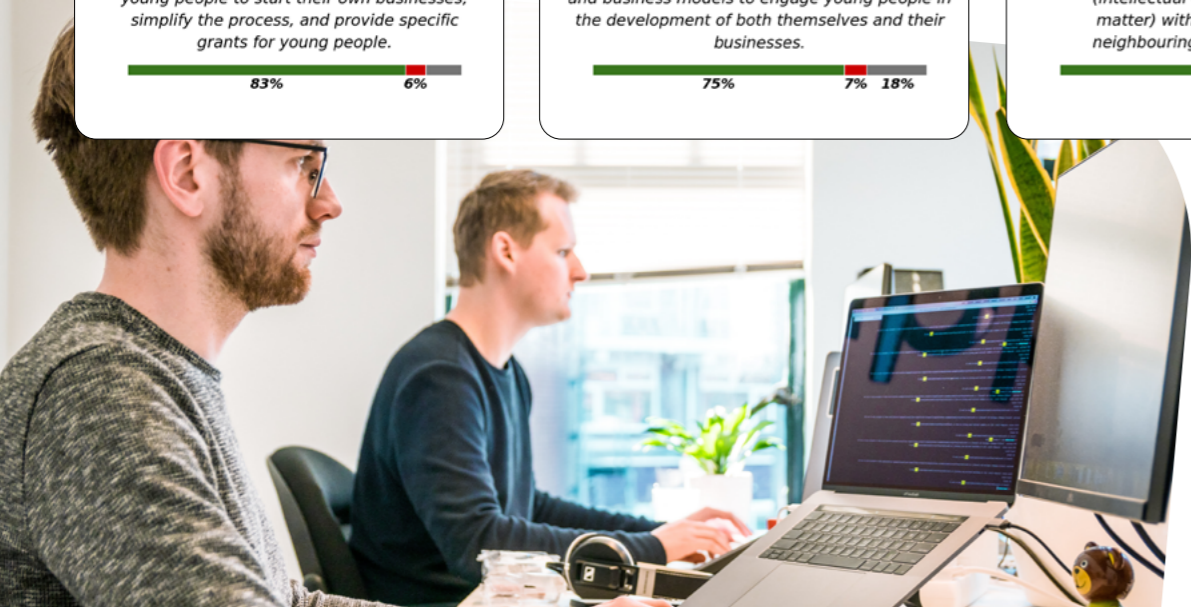
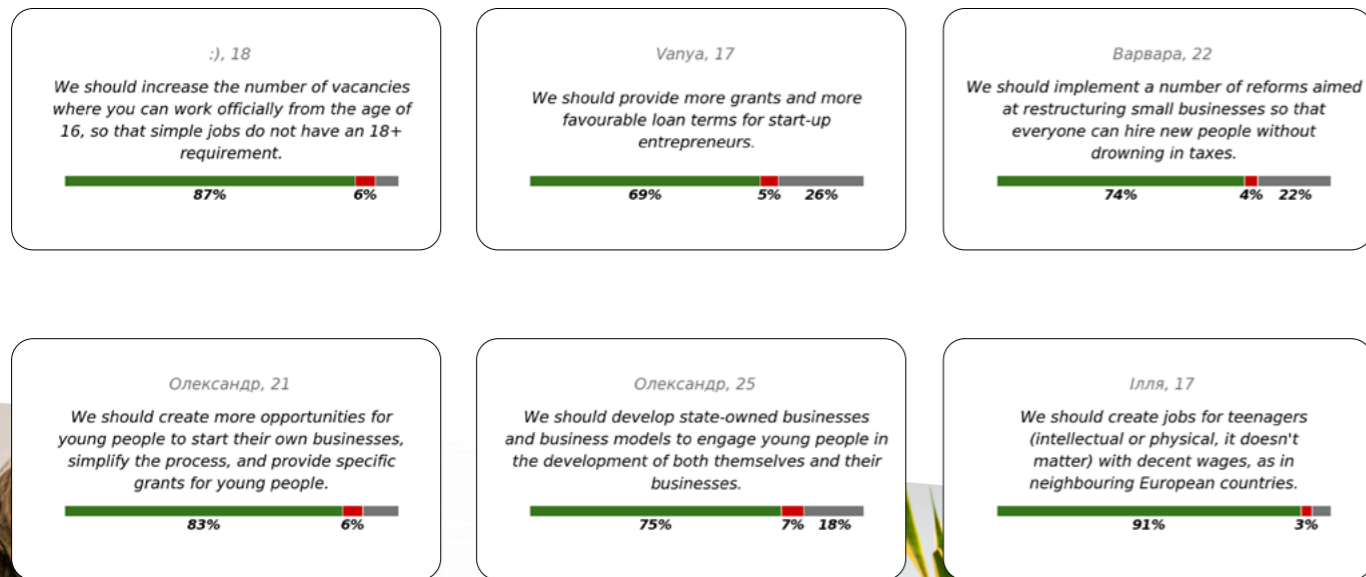
# Supporting initiatives for youth employment and entrepreneurship development

18 proposals 79% of votes in favour on average

This set of proposals suggests ways to improve economic opportunities in Ukraine, especially for young people.

The proposals include increasing the number of jobs available for young people, promoting the development of domestic businesses, providing grants and favourable loan conditions for start-ups, simplifying the process for young people to open their own businesses and reducing taxes for small businesses to make it easier for them to recruit new people.

## Proposal examples



♥ Popular idea 02

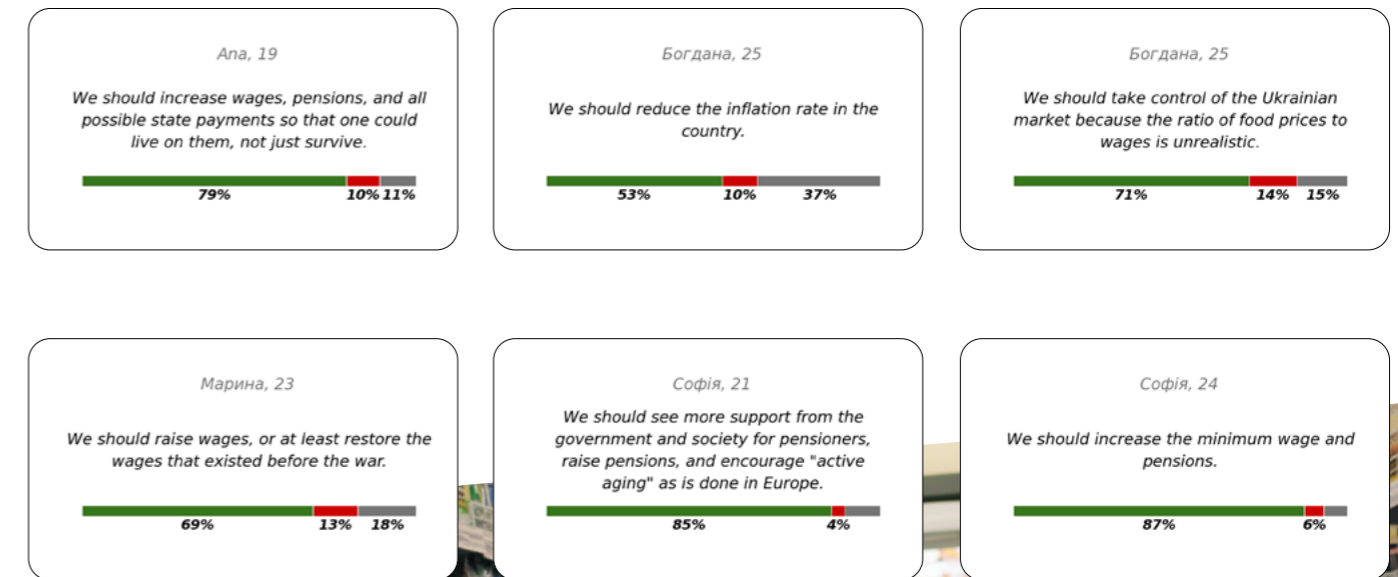
# Increasing citizens' purchasing power

12 proposals 75% of votes in favour on average

Participants agree to improve the economic well-being of citizens, especially pensioners and low-wage workers, by increasing pensions, the minimum wage and state payments, and by reducing mobile rates. This would allow citizens to afford the necessities (from groceries to house purchase).

Additionally, it is important to restore pre-war salaries and benefits to workers.

## Proposal examples



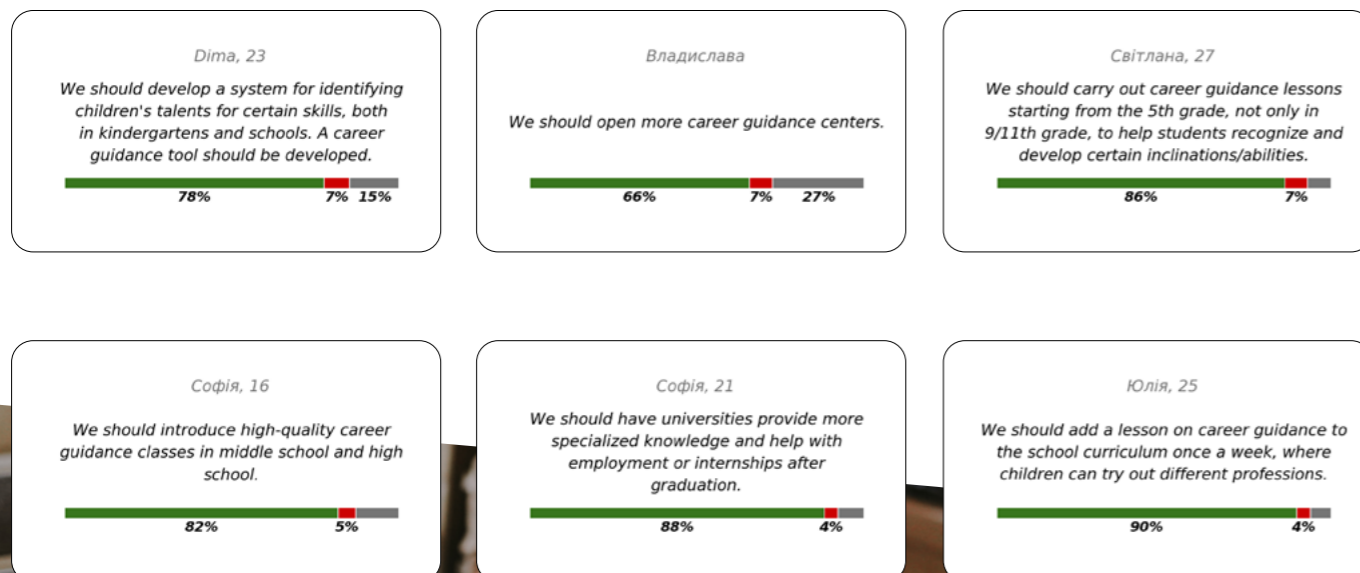
♥ Popular idea 03

## Improving career development for students

6 proposals 82% of votes in favour on average

Schools and universities should provide more specialized knowledge and support with employment or practical experience. According to participants, more vocational centres need to be opened and a mechanism needs to be developed to identify children's talents and skills.

### Proposal examples



*We should introduce high-quality career guidance classes in middle school and high school.*

Софія, 16





# 05 Culture and identity

## Popular Idea

Promoting Ukrainian culture in response to Russian influence

## Controversial idea

Strongly limiting Russian cultural and linguistic influence

 Popular idea 01

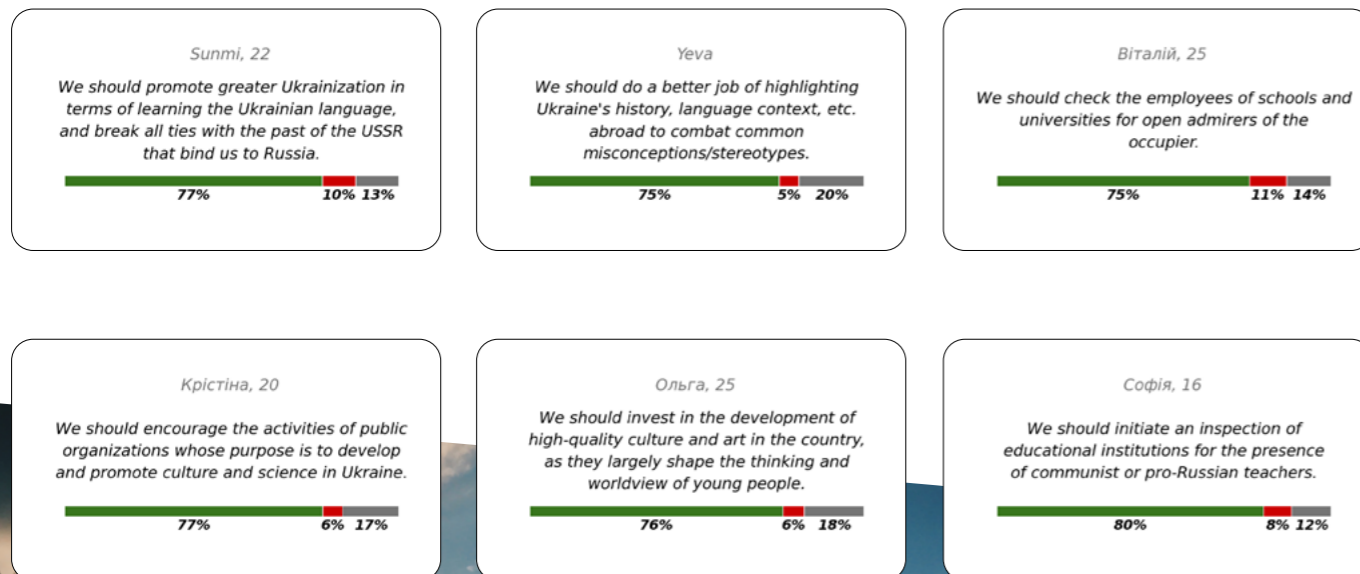
# Promoting Ukrainian culture in response to Russian influence

19 proposals 76% of votes in favour on average

Participants suggest that it is necessary to take measures to counter Russian influence in Ukraine, for example by banning the Moscow patriarchy, cutting off trade with Russia, conducting deontological inspections among school and university staff to limit pro-Russian tendencies, combatting Russian propaganda, and promoting correct usage of Ukrainian names in foreign media.

Proposals also suggest promoting cultural and national development to affirm the Ukrainian identity: investing in promoting culture and art, supporting cultural and scientific NGO's, promoting Ukraine's language and history, emphasizing their importance in education and society, and promoting the use of the national language in the workplace and society.

## Proposal examples


 Controversial idea 01

# Strongly limiting Russian cultural and linguistic influence

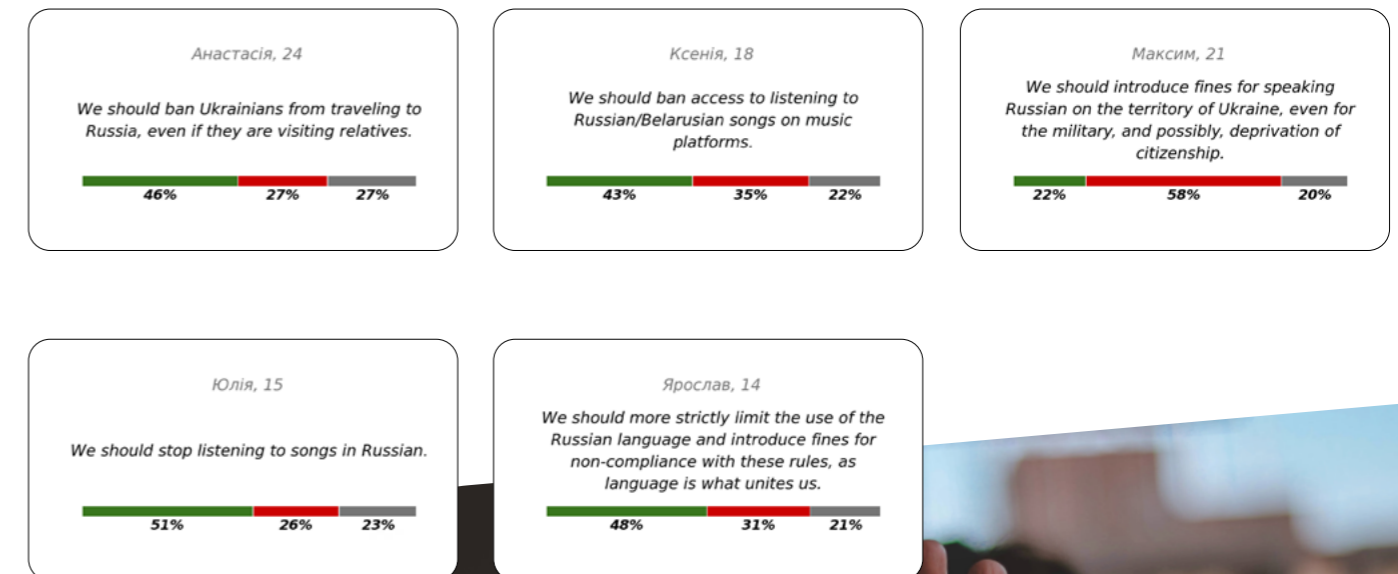
5 proposals 42% in favour and 35% against on average

## What is a controversial idea ?

A proposal is considered controversial when it obtains as many "in favour" votes as "against" and as many "favourite" remarks as "no way!". The most controversial proposals of the consultation are then grouped together to identify the controversial ideas.

Participants are divided regarding limiting Russian influence in Ukraine, especially when it comes to enforcing harsh penalties and restrictions. This controversial idea advocates restrictions on the use of the Russian language in Ukraine, with penalties for its use and limitations on access to Russian-language media. It also calls for a ban on travel to Russia, even for visiting relatives, and suggests consequences such as deprivation of citizenship for violating language restrictions.

## Proposal examples



# 06 Institutions and democracy

## Popular ideas

1. Reforming democratic institutions
2. Accelerating the accession to the EU

## Controversial ideas

1. Restricting the right to vote
2. Legalizing same-sex marriage

♥ Popular idea 01

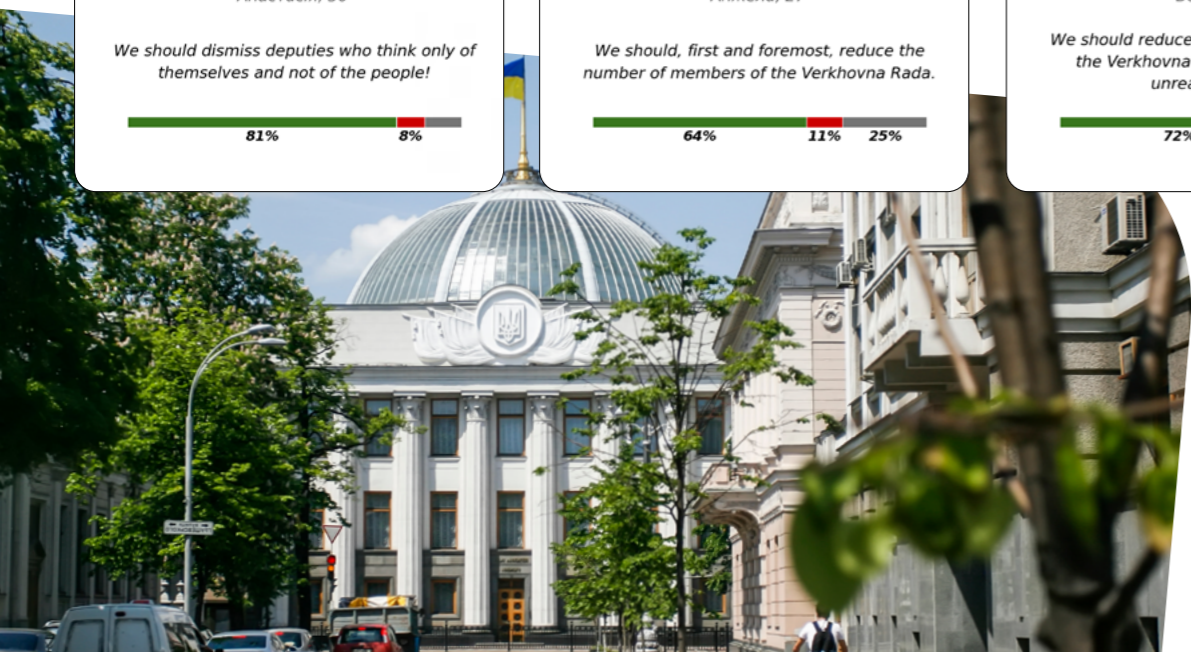
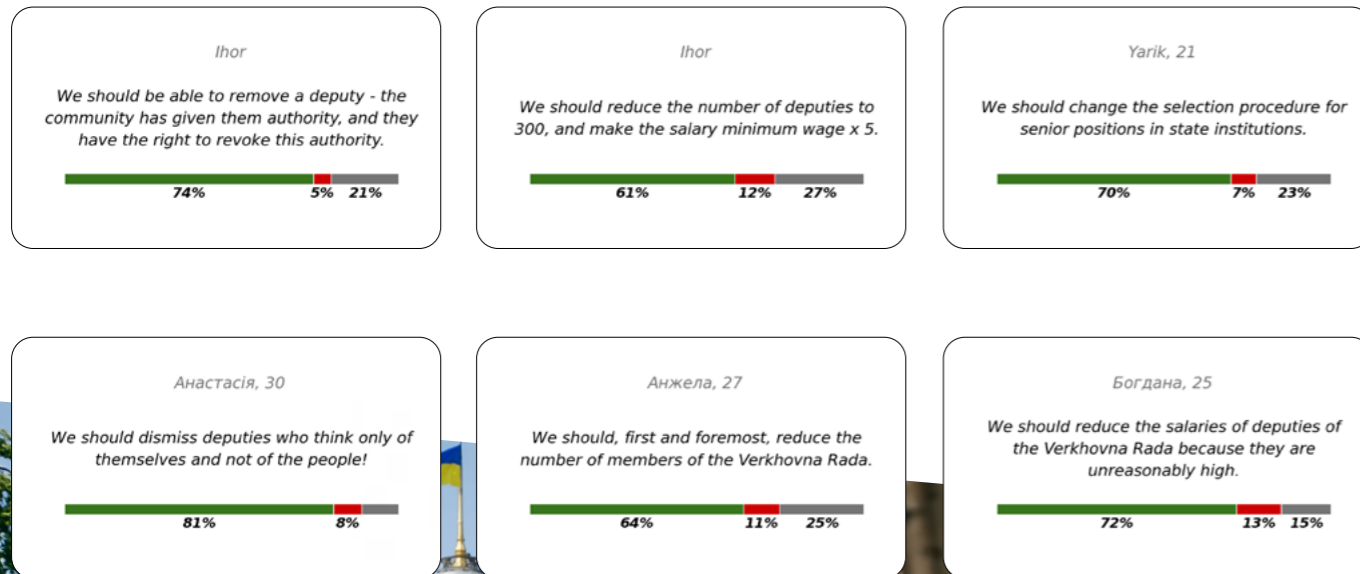
# Reforming democratic institutions

8 proposals 70% of votes in favour on average

Participants agree to reduce the number of members of the Verkhovna Rada, decrease their salaries and hold them accountable to the community.

Additionally, they suggest changing the procedures for selecting people for management positions in state bodies.

## Proposal examples



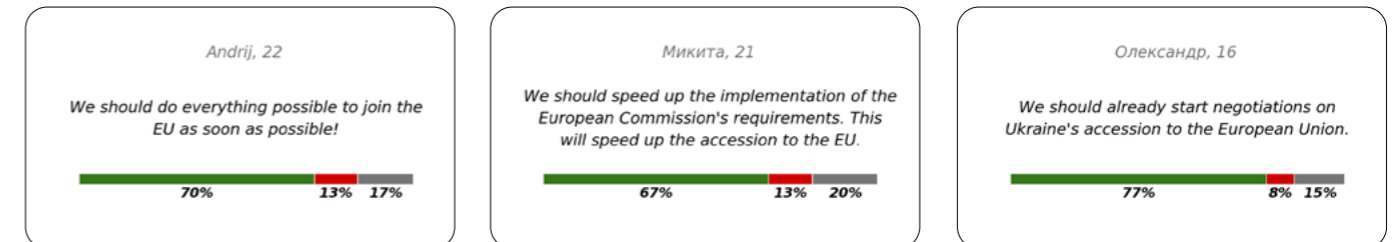
♥ Popular idea 02

# Accelerating the accession to the EU

5 proposals 71% of votes in favour on average

These popular proposals express the urgency of beginning negotiations for Ukraine's entry into the European Union, emphasizing the need to make every effort to join the EU as quickly as possible.

## Proposal examples



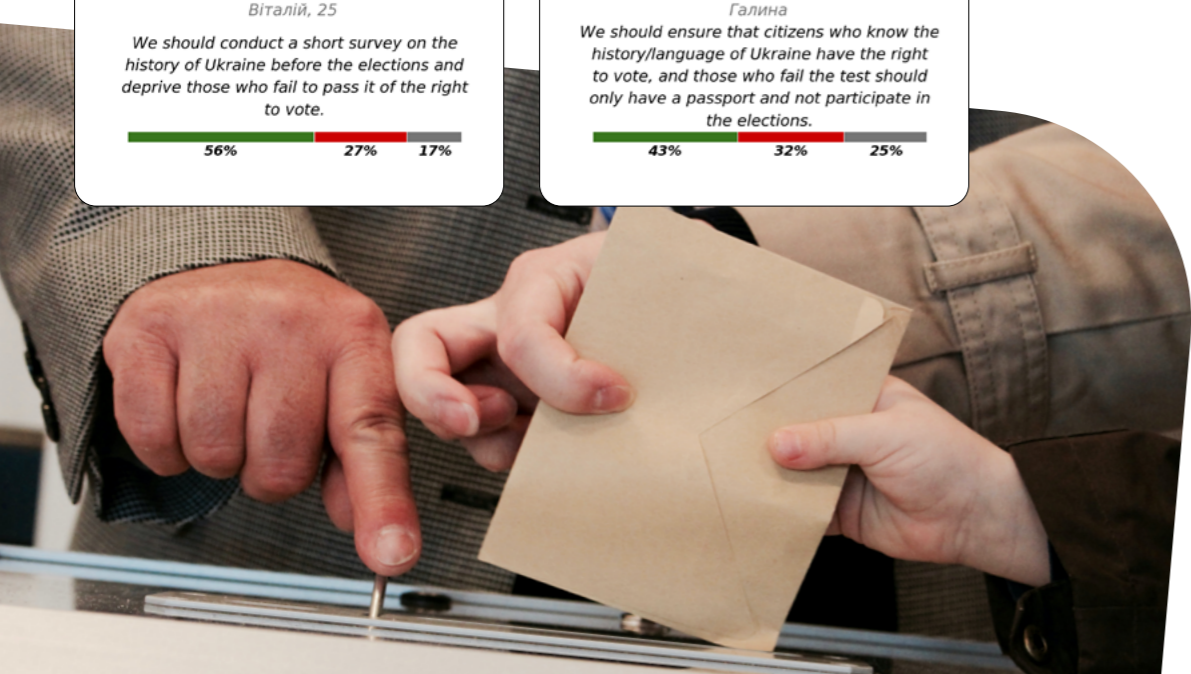
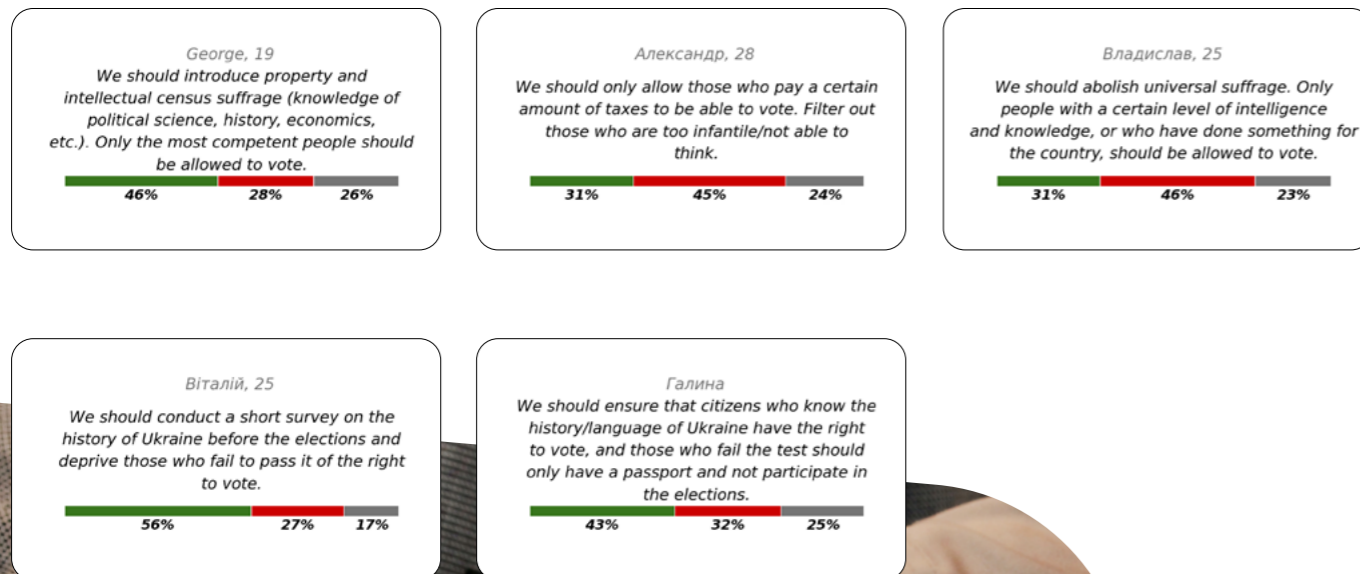
**⚡ Controversial idea 01**

# Conditioning the right to vote

5 proposals    41% in favour and 36% against on average

The right to vote is one of the most controversial issues in the consultation. It is proposed that voting rights should be limited to those who meet certain criteria such as: tax payment, intellectual qualities, knowledge of Ukraine’s history and language and passing a test on the history of Ukraine.

## Proposal examples



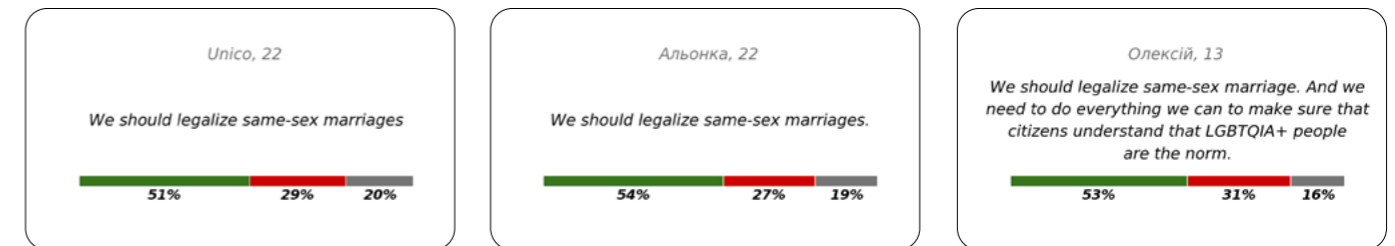
**⚡ Controversial idea 02**

# Legalizing same-sex marriages

4 proposals    53% in favour and 29% against on average

Same-sex marriage is one of the controversial issues in this consultation. Participants disagree regarding its institutionalization.

## Proposal examples





# 07 Justice and security

## Popular ideas

1. Strengthening the fight against corruption
2. Strengthening the military defence

## Controversial ideas

1. Facilitating gun ownership
2. Introducing death penalty

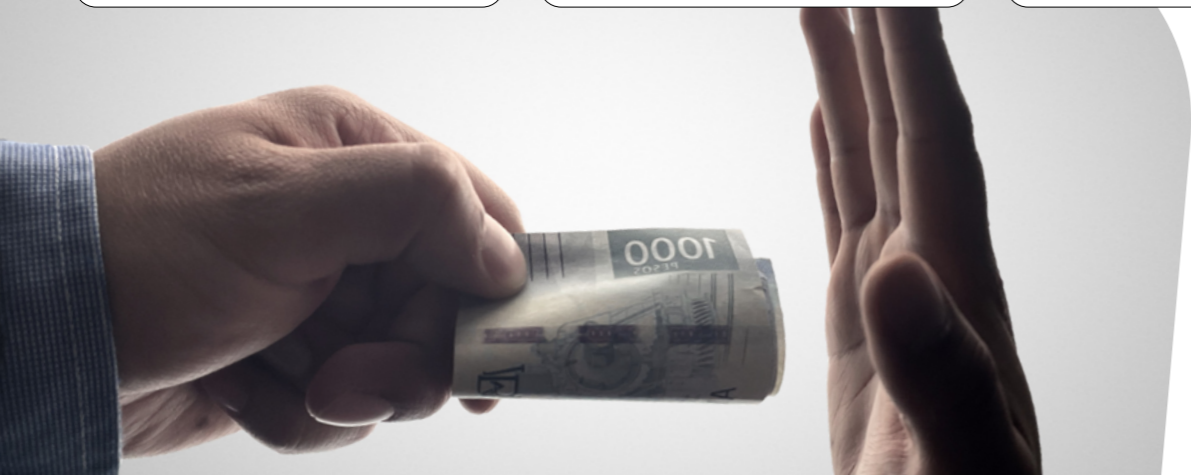
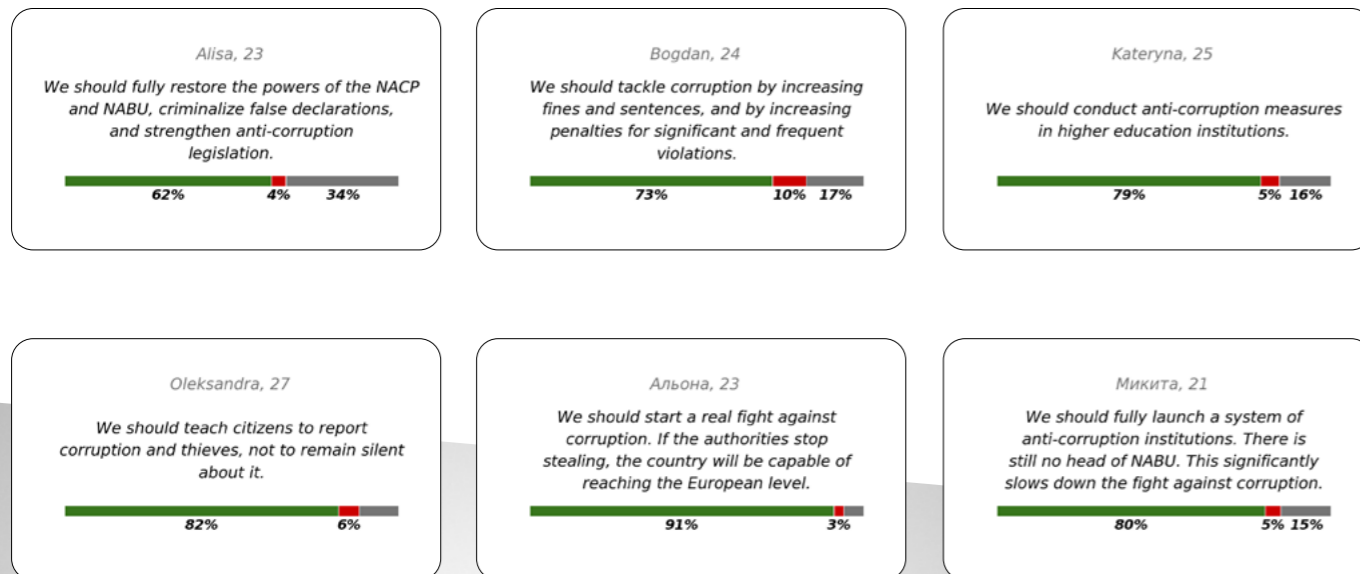
♥ Popular idea 01

## Strengthening the fight against corruption

21 proposals 76% of votes in favour on average

Proposals are focused on improving the fight against corruption in Ukraine and they call for: raising public awareness about corruption and encouraging citizens to speak out against it; strengthening the anti-corruption bodies, such as NABU, imposing more serious penalties for acts of corruption; increasing penalties and terms of punishment for significant and frequent violations of anti-corruption laws.

### Proposal examples



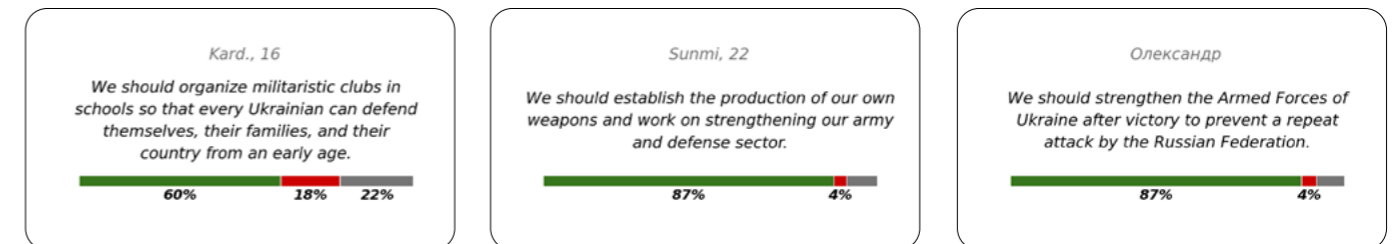
♥ Popular idea 02

## Strengthening military defence

3 proposals 78% of votes in favour on average

Participants suggest that Ukraine should prioritize the establishment of its own weapons production and focus on strengthening its military and defence capabilities. This includes strengthening the Armed Forces to prevent future attacks by Russia and promoting militaristic circles in schools to educate citizens on self-defence and protection of the country.

### Proposal examples



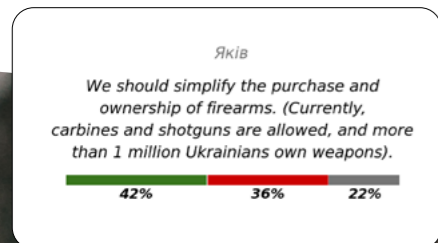
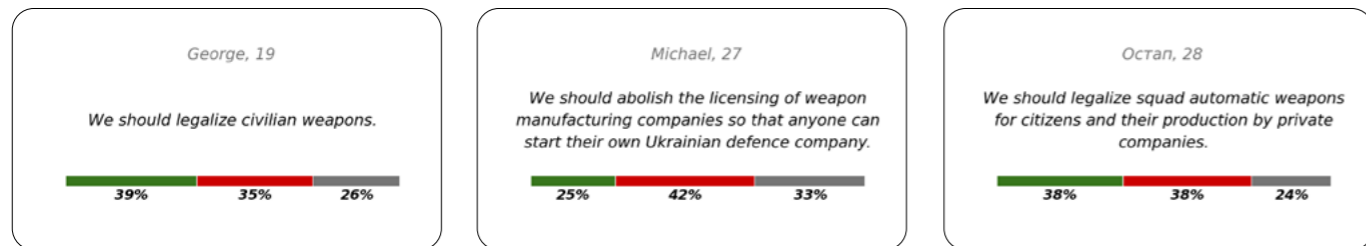
⚡ Controversial idea 01

# Facilitating gun ownership

4 proposals    36% in favour and 38% against on average

It is debated that the purchase and possession of firearms should be simplified and that firearms should be legalized, including light weapons for citizens and private companies.

## Proposal examples



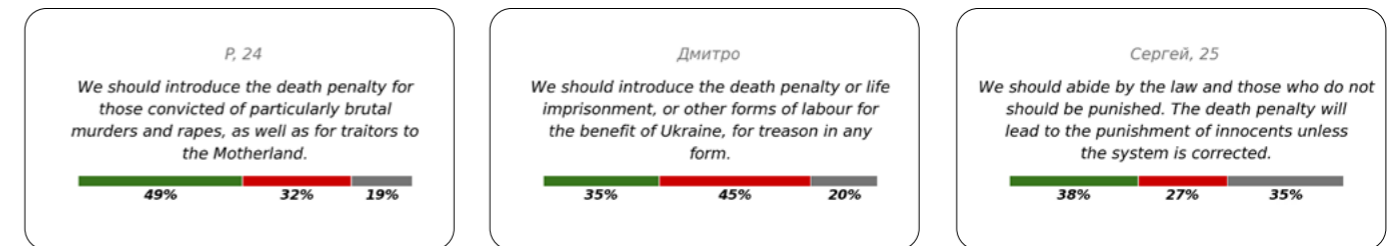
⚡ Controversial idea 02

# Introducing death penalty

3 proposals    41% in favour and 34% against on average

The death penalty is once again a controversial subject. The proposals discuss the death penalty for those convicted of particularly cruel murder, rape or treason.

## Proposal examples



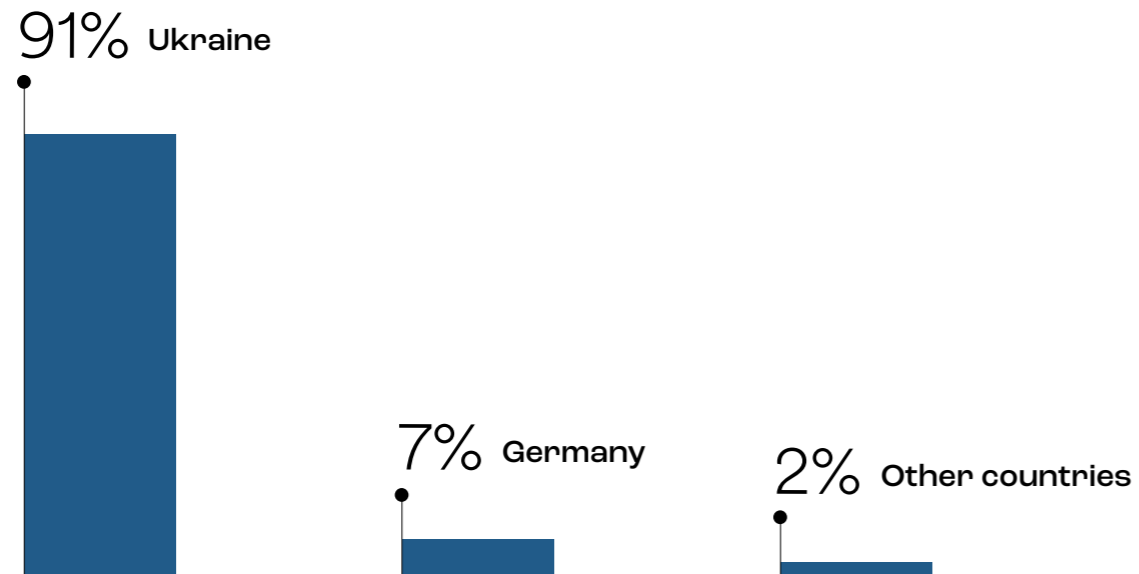




# **Young Ukrainians living abroad: relevant insights and proposals**

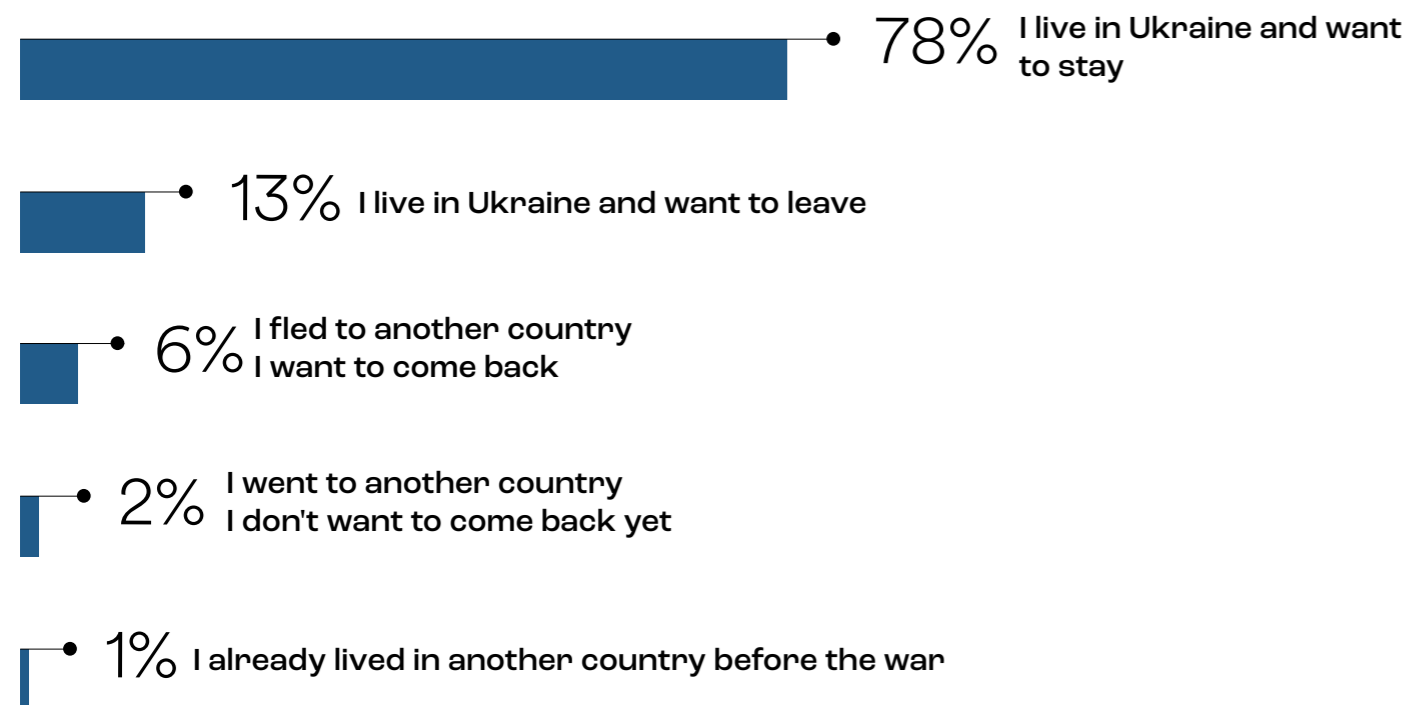
## Share of votes by country

As the chart shows, the vast majority of participants and votes in this consultation came from participants living in Ukraine (Chart 1 - Share of votes by country).



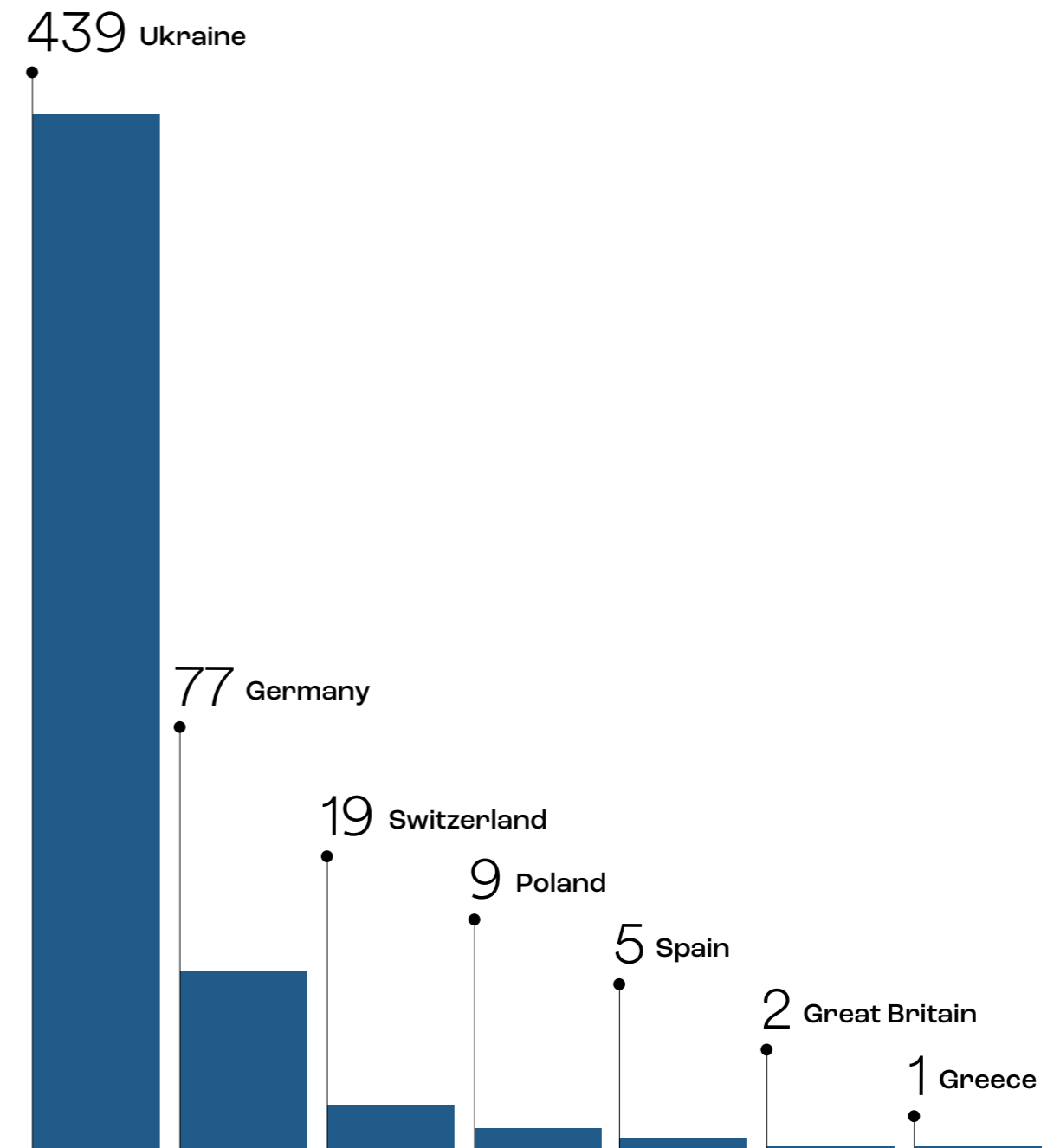
## Situation

Thanks to the additional question we submitted to the participants, we were able to gather more information about their situation. Answers show that, regardless of their location, the vast majority of the participants envision their future in Ukraine (Chart 2 - Situation).



## Number of proposals by country

Although most of the participants live in Ukraine, we collected 111 proposals from participants living abroad (Germany, 77; Switzerland, 19; Poland, 9; Spain, 5; Great Britain, 2; Greece, 1), which allowed us to provide some interesting elements (Chart 3 - Number of proposals by country).



**The following proposals show us the expatriate perspective on domestic issues or provide examples of problems specifically related to Ukrainians living abroad.**

For instance, Ukrainians living abroad may be more concerned about the promotion of Ukrainian culture as well as the Ukraine's image abroad, shaped by the Russian influence.

*“It is necessary for foreign media and government agencies to use the correct names of Ukrainian settlements, not Russian transliteration.”*

*“It is necessary to educate people on the history of Ukraine, the language context, etc. abroad to counteract widespread mistakes/stereotypes.”*

*“It is necessary to invest in the development of the country’s quality culture and art, because they largely form the thinking and worldview of young people.”*

They are also more likely to compare the Ukrainian social and political system to the system of other countries, aspiring to make it more “European”.

*“It is necessary for the authorities and society to give pensioners more support, increase pensions and encourage ‘active ageing’ as is done in Europe.”*

Young Ukrainians living abroad are also more vocal about the position of European countries and the support they should give Ukrainian students who are struggling as a result of the war, living abroad or in Ukraine.

*“European universities/states should provide financial support to Ukrainian students who find themselves in a difficult situation due to the war.”*



# Kateryna-Sofiia

25, student

**Proposal:** *"We should introduce the history of Ukraine as one of the main subjects in all educational processes"...*

I was born in the city of Kirovohrad, now called Kropyvnytskyi. I moved to Odessa to study and have lived there for the last 5 years. On 22 February 2022, I went to Germany for a few days and stayed there because of the full-scale war. Now I am studying piano at the Odessa National Music Academy.

Currently studying in a conservatoire, I am closely connected with the history of Ukrainian compositional and performing arts. I am very happy that pro-Ukrainian education has now taken off. We have almost stopped talking about the composers of the aggressor country, whereas before the war, many Russian composers used to be put above our Ukrainian musical culture.

I think it is important for every conscious citizen of Ukraine to learn about our country's past, especially now that we are scattered across different countries and continents. We have to bring our culture to the world and educate people about our history, so that foreigners do not have questions like "is Ukraine art of Russia?". To quote the words of Oleksandr Dovzhenko, a prominent Ukrainian film director and writer: "A nation that does not know its history is a blind nation." I absolutely agree. We must study history to be able to identify ourselves as a separate nation.

Nowadays, it is more important than ever that children, students and adults know who they are and what their Ukrainian ancestors went through for them. Knowing a country's history also helps a lot to look at the mistakes of your people.

Personally, I am very ashamed because I did not speak Ukrainian for a long time. When I moved to Odessa, I started speaking Russian under the influence of the majority. I am also ashamed that I used to be less interested in Ukrainian composers and art because there was always something different to perform, often Russian composers...

We need to open our eyes and look forward, but without forgetting what Russia is doing to us now, and what it did 100 and 200 years ago.

I hope our government will continue to prevent corruption, because this is the first thing that will help us to leave behind the time when we were "friends" with the aggressor state and prevent this from happening again. I hope that Ukrainians will continue to become more conscious and understand their national identity more deeply. I want the words "I am a Ukrainian" to be something never to be ashamed of, and I want our Ukrainian flag always to be proudly carried in foreign countries.

Regarding my proposal, I hope that the Ukrainian Ministries of Culture, Education and Science will ensure that young people will have the opportunity to study what they are truly interested in, that the educational material will be diverse and truthful, without any propaganda, which was the case in old textbooks that were compiled under Russian influence. I hope only for the best, and for the consciousness of all our citizens.

# Vladyslava

16, high school student

**Proposal:** *"We should provide young children and adolescents with high-quality free psychological assistance".*

I am originally from Kyiv, and currently live in Germany, in Berlin.

I think psychological assistance should be developed at state level, because children's mental state affects their behaviour in adulthood. Looking at myself and my environment, I see that absolutely everyone has some kind of disorder that prevents them from living normally, socializing, perceiving themselves in a healthy way. And older generations often do not see the point in therapists or simply do not have the financial resources for psychological treatment of their children.

It would be wrong to say that mental healthcare is not promoted in Ukraine and that there is no free psychological help at all. There are call centres that teenagers can contact, but the sessions are short, more focused on a friendly form of conversation and general advice than on real treatment. From my own experience, I can add that school counselors, whom I visited twice, are not competent enough, and

the meetings were not anonymous, which I do not consider to be a suitable therapy.

I believe that a healthy mind is a basis for building a healthy society and the future of the nation. To confirm this, we can compare the lists of countries with the best standard of living and those that take care of their citizens' mental health: we will find a clear relationship.

Unfortunately, Ukraine is not yet on either of these lists.

However, in general, I have quite positive expectations for the future of our country, because I know many ambitious young people who are full of ideas and desires, and ready to implement them to improve life in our homeland, to make it safe and comfortable. The problem is we need the support and concern of adults. I would also like to see more opportunities for teenagers to fulfill themselves, to organize projects, for example volunteering to help improve the country right now.

# Appendices

# Methodology

Consult our moderation charter:  
[about.make.org/moderation](https://about.make.org/moderation)

## Data collection

The Make.org platform collects two types of data: citizens' proposals written in 140 characters and votes on those proposals. Citizens' proposals are answers to single open-ended questions, such as "Young Ukrainians: How can you be helped to build your future?"

Participants arrive on the platform via an interface called "the sequence", optimized to encourage participation. The sequence presents a series of 12 proposals on which participants are invited to vote "in favour", "against" or "I am neutral". After this first vote, the participants are invited to qualify their vote by indicating whether they find the proposal "realistic", "obvious", "favourite" or "irrelevant". This remark is optional. On average, 60% of the participants add a remark.

Halfway through this sequence, participants are invited to submit their own proposal. This action is also optional. On average, depending on the consultation, between 5% and 10% of participants submit a proposal. Some participants submit several proposals.

Before being published, proposals submitted must be validated by the moderators of Make.org, in accordance with the law and our moderation guidelines. Proposals are not rewritten but spelling mistakes may be corrected.

## Emergence algorithm

A central component of our platform is the algorithm that chooses the proposals submitted to the vote of each participant on the "sequence" (see "Data collection" section). The objective of this algorithm is to give each proposal an equal opportunity of exposure, while concentrating the votes on the most interesting proposals for analysis: the most consensual and the most controversial. These interesting proposals are called the emerging proposals.

In particular, the algorithm guarantees the neutralization of trolling attempts since the proposals submitted to votes are chosen by the algorithm and not by the voters. The source code of this algorithm is public and auditable.

## Analysis of the emerging proposals

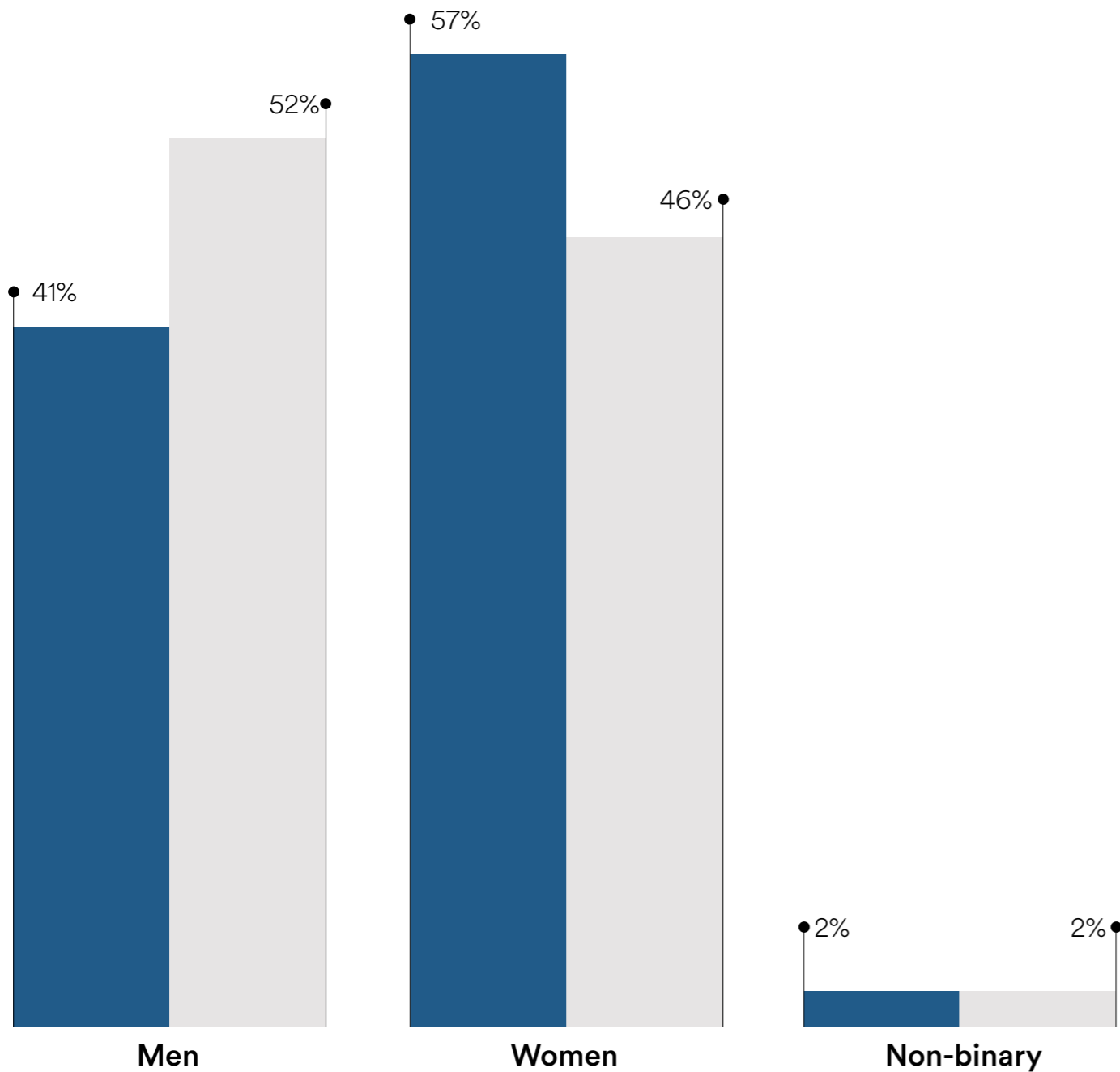
For the analysis of popular and controversial ideas from a Make.org consultation, we focus on what we term "emerging proposals", the most consensual and controversial proposals. We proceed to the analysis of all these proposals by grouping together the proposals that convey the same ideas. The grouping into "ideas" is based on the main meaning expressed in the citizens' proposals, without over-interpretation of the citizens' words.

Ideas are often composed of several dozens of proposals, each having aggregated more than a hundred votes, thus allowing us to make our results more reliable by reducing the margins of error.

# Demographics

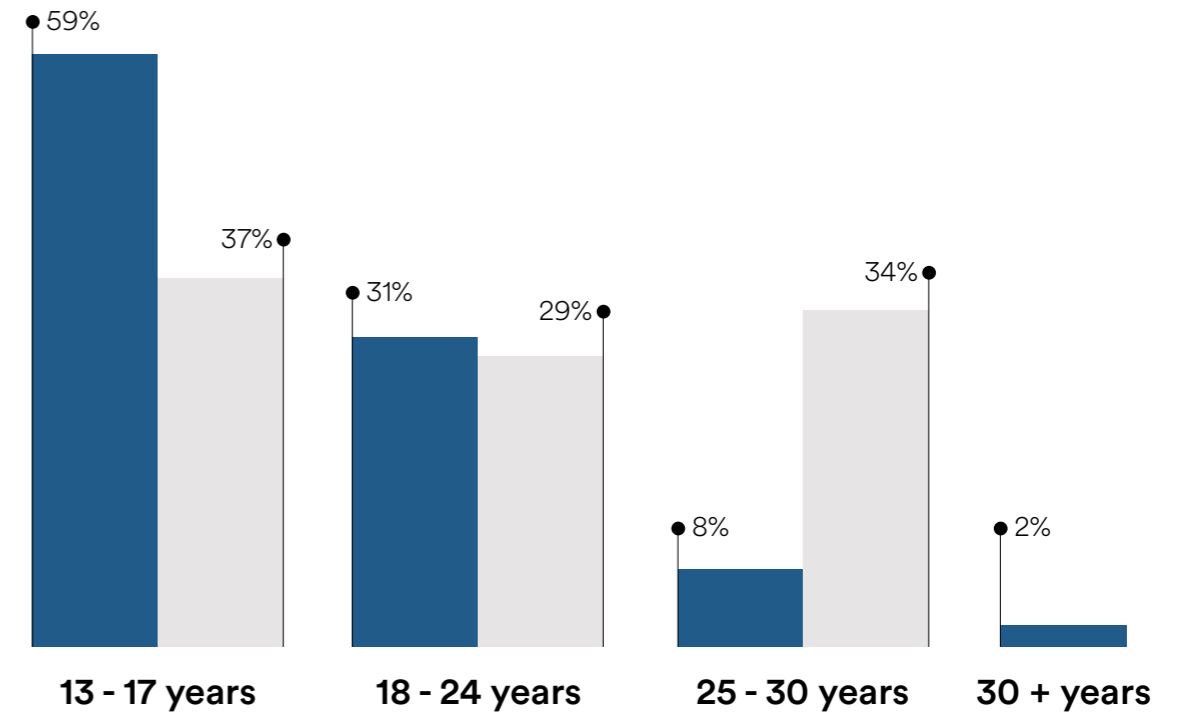
## Participation by gender

● Votes ● Population\*

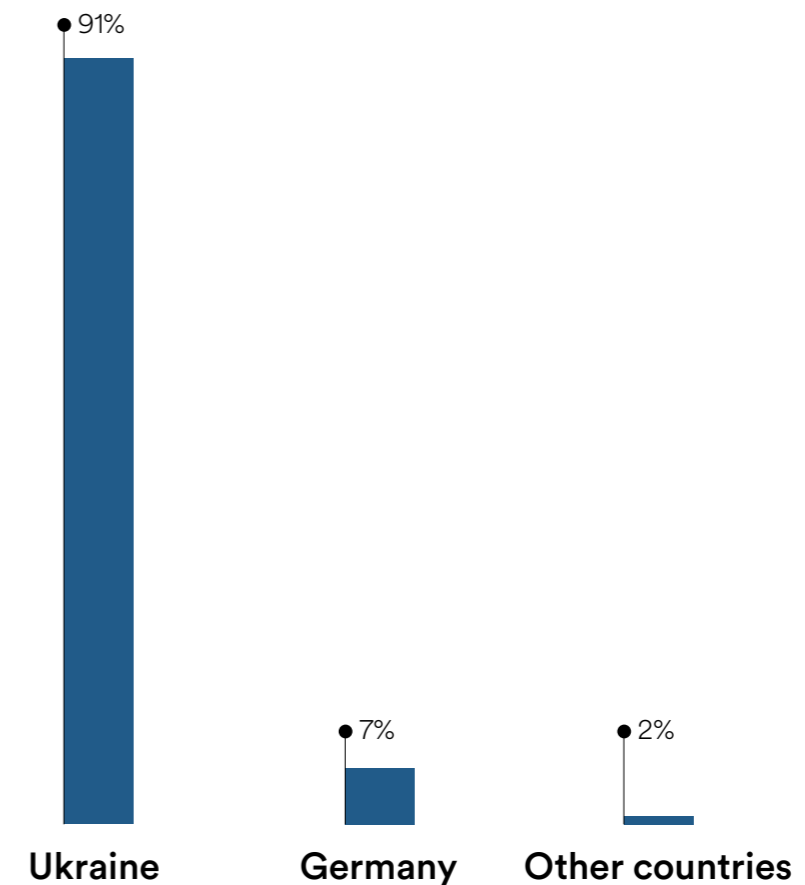


## Participation by age

● Votes ● Population\*



## Participation by place of residence



\*United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision

# About us and contact



## About Make.org

Make.org is a neutral and independent organization whose mission is to involve citizens and mobilize the whole of civil society for a positive transformation of society. To achieve this, Make.org has developed a unique method of massive consultation, capable of reaching several million people. The approach consists in identifying the ideas that are most widely supported, and then building a collective action that is legitimized by the support of the largest number of people. As expressed in its Ethical Charter, Make.org is a democratic, civic and European platform, neutral, independent, transparent and respectful of personal data. Make.org is present in Berlin, Brussels and Paris. More about: [make.org](https://make.org)



## About Schüler Helfen Leben

Schüler Helfen Leben is the largest youth-led aid organization in Germany. It promotes and runs youth and education projects in south-eastern Europe, Jordan and Germany with a focus on youth involvement, political education and anti-discrimination. In 2022, projects for young people affected by the current war against Ukraine were added. Once a year, Schüler Helfen Leben organizes a Social Day throughout Germany, when 60,000 pupils swap their school desk for a job for one day and donate their wages to their peers. This raises about 1 million euros every year.





