

IMPACT OF WAR ON YOUTH IN UKRAINE

Findings and Recommendations

The full report is available here



The report was prepared by UNDP external consultant Yulia Petsyk, based on the data, results and recommendations of nationwide research «Impact of war on youth» which was conducted by the NGO «Cedos Analytical Center» and the research agency «Info Sapiens» with the initiative, as well as financial, technical, and organizational support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Ukraine, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ukraine, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund recognize youth as key agents of change in promoting resilience, sustainable recovery, and long-term peace. Building on close collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and significant experience supporting youth participation at national, regional, and local levels, both agencies support increasing the influence of young voices and their participation in decision-making processes at all levels in the humanitarian sphere and efforts towards recovery in line with the "Youth, Peace, and Security" agenda.

Since 2015, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been commissioning an annual study to assess the situation of youth, with a particular emphasis on their socio-economic status, values, and preferences. In continuation of this initiative, a recent round of research was conducted towards the end of 2022, which shifted its focus to evaluating the impact of the full-scale invasion on the younger population.

This publication provides a comprehensive overview of the latest research on the impact of armed conflict on youth in Ukraine, along with practical recommendations for policy makers at the national, regional, and local levels, as well as civil society organizations operating throughout the country. The main goal of this publication is to inform ongoing policy development efforts and to supplement them with quantitative and qualitative data for further evidence and analysis.

The publication covers a range of topics related to the impact of armed conflict on youth in Ukraine, including its effects on their day-to-day lives, long-term plans (including migration), the state of vulnerable youth, changes in perceptions of different marginalized and vulnerable groups, youth perspectives on peace, and an analysis of youth political and civic engagement.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The study consisted of two components: quantitative and qualitative. The fieldwork was conducted by the sociological firm Info Sapiens from October 2022 to January 2023.

The quantitative component includes surveys of youth both within Ukraine and abroad. The sample of youth within Ukraine consisted of 2064 respondents aged 14-34 years old, and the survey was conducted from November 21 to December 7, 2022, through face-to-face interviews at the respondent's home. The sample was designed to be representative of the Ukrainian population aged 14-34 years old in terms of gender, age (14-23 and 24-34 years old), region, and settlement size based on pre-war residency data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine as of January 1, 2022.

The qualitative component included 2 focus group discussions (one with women and one with men) with young people from the following groups: • Non-governmental organizations (NGOs); • Living in rural areas; • With disabilities; • Roma youth; • Youth who have traveled abroad; • LGBTQI+ youth.

In total, 12 focus group discussions were conducted. 10 of them were held online during December 2022, with 8 participants in each group. Two focus group discussions with Roma youth were held offline in the Zakarpattia region. Additionally, 6 individual interviews were conducted with Roma and LGBTQI+ individuals who experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity/sexual orientation during the war: 3 with men and 3 with women from each group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has had devastating consequences, including significant human losses, population displacement, and forced deportations to Russia. The conflict has inflicted severe damage to infrastructure across the country, resulting in numerous civilian casualties, including children. In the midst of these challenges, it is paramount to prioritize the needs and aspirations of Ukrainian youth, who are striving for education, employment, and the pursuit of fulfilling lives. To effectively support and involve young Ukrainians in the process of recovery, it is essential to gain a deep understanding of their specific needs, address barriers that hinder their participation, and ensure their active involvement in local decision-making processes.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had significant impacts on its youth. About **82%** of young people reported experiencing losses due to the war.

- **50%** in 2022 vs. **35%** in 2021 of young people expressed concerns about their own or their loved one's health
- **22%** in 2022 vs. **11%** in 2021 expressed worry around their mental health
- **40%** in 2022 vs. **23%** in 2021 reported food insecurity and inability to cover their basic needs.
- **27%** of young people indicate concerns about their physical safety
- **19%** expressed worries about limited opportunities for self-realization and difficulties in finding employment.

Only **1%** of young people states that they are currently involved in the recovery efforts in their community, while **72%** are willing to contribute to such endeavors.

However, the report highlights several trends among young people that contribute to strengthening the stability of Ukrainian society:

- A significant **increase in civic engagement**:
 - The percentage of youth engaged in volunteering has risen from **20%** to **42%**.
 - The number of young people who joined volunteering activities within the last 12 months increased from **6%** in 2021 to **30%** in 2022.
- A growing proportion of young people (**66%**) **do not wish to emigrate from Ukraine**, compared to **49%** in 2021. **76%** of young people who emigrated due to the war express the desire to return to Ukraine.
A strong unity in vision for peace and the future of Ukraine:
 - **86%** of respondents consider the option of "Ukraine claiming only the territory currently under its control" as completely unacceptable.
 - **71%** reject the option of peace with Ukraine controlling the territory as of February 23, 2022.
- **Increased support for NATO membership**: **80%** of young people now express support, compared to **59%** in 2021.
Increased support for EU membership: **85%** of young people now express support, compared to **57%** in 2021.
- **Improved tolerance** towards stigmatized vulnerable groups:
 - The proportion of young people who do not wish to live next to Roma people decreased from **44%** to **35%**.
 - The percentage of young people who do not wish to live next to LGBTIQ+ individuals decreased from **31%** to **28%**.

Based on this data, policymakers and civil society in Ukraine should prioritize the following actions: focusing on equitable healthcare access, expanding financial assistance and career education for young people, investing in local infrastructure, targeting vulnerable groups with specialized programs, integrating youth voices in peacebuilding efforts, and supporting existing youth recovery initiatives. Additionally, effective communication through popular platforms should be utilized to engage and inform the youth. These measures will contribute to the well-being and active participation of young Ukrainians in the country's development and recovery.

LIVING ONE'S LIFE IN THE MIDST OF WAR: CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH

Top Concerns for Youth in Ukraine

	2021	2022
Health (personal and family)	35%	50%
Power outages, unstable internet and mobile (phone) communication ¹	-	50%
Lack of money	46%	31%
Physical safety (personal or family)	-	27%
Mental health (mood swings, depression, anxiety, loneliness)	11%	22%

The study reveals that concerns regarding both physical and mental health have nearly doubled, with young women expressing more concern at 54% (compared to 46% of men). However, the decline in anxieties relating to financial stability does not suggest any progress, but rather a lack of priority, as close to 40% of young people are still unable to meet their basic needs in 2022 (as opposed to 23% in 2021).

Top Priorities for Youth in Ukraine

	2021	2022
Family Wellbeing	63%	71%
Health	53%	62%
Career	47%	56%
Freedom of personal choice	28%	52%
Wealth and prosperity	32%	41%

In 2022, the top values remained unchanged, but their scores notably increased, possibly due to a reevaluation of life values in the context of a full-scale invasion. Interestingly, young men and women living outside of Ukraine placed personal freedom as their third priority (60%) and benefiting their country as their fourth priority (57%). They also placed less importance on material values such as wealth and career, with almost 40% of youth unable to cover their basic needs in 2022 (compared to 23% in 2021), possibly reflecting their experience of greater instability in those areas.

Professional Aspirations and Career

Surprisingly, young people aged 14-19 place more importance on their career (64%) compared to those aged 30-35 (44%). When it comes to job prospects, the survey participants found business and entrepreneurship, as well as IT to be most promising, similarly to responses in 2021. However, there's been a shift as military service has now taken the third spot in terms of perceived success.

¹ The research was conducted during November 2022, when power outages were widespread across Ukraine due to frequent missile and drone attacks. As of May 2023, during the time of this publication, power outages became less frequent and it can be hypothesized that this concern would not be at the top of list.

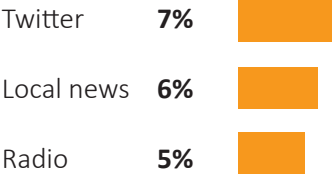
Top Careers in Terms of Perceived Success:
Business and Entrepreneurship | IT/Software Engineering | Military Service

Media and Language

Most Popular News Sources



Least Popular News Sources



More Youth Uses Ukrainian to Communicate:



Actions for Policy Makers and Civil Society

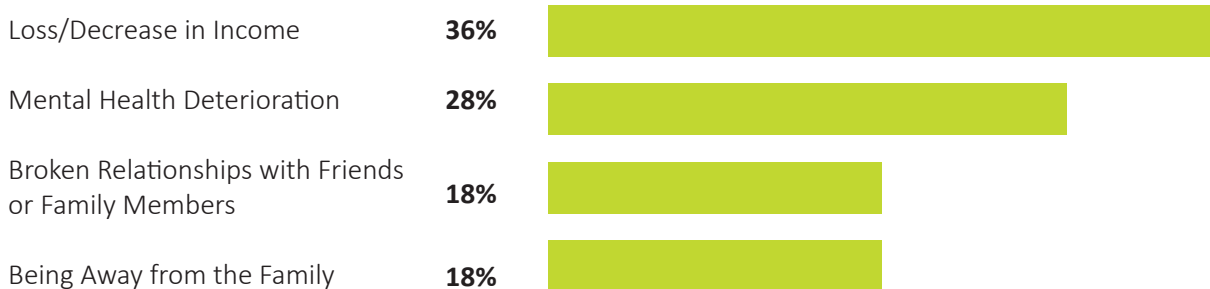
1. Focus on improving access to equitable healthcare, with a special attention to mental health services
2. Expand financial assistance and supplementary income opportunities for youth
3. Educate younger generation (14-19) about diverse career opportunities and career paths
4. Communicate important information and raise awareness among youth using most accessible platforms for information – Telegram, YouTube, Instagram.

² In comparison with the responses to the same survey question in 2021

UPENDED PLANS AND MIGRATION

The impact of war on Ukrainian youth has been severe, with 82% of them reporting significant losses as a result. The effects of the conflict are far-reaching and have had a detrimental effect on the mental health of the population, while the severe 27% consumer inflation has had a major impact on their livelihoods. It is highly unlikely that anyone in Ukraine has been able to avoid the negative implications of war. Even the remaining 18% who have not reported any losses may not fully realize or acknowledge the gravity of the situation or find their personal experience insignificant in comparison with larger tragedies.

Most Common Experiences Related to War³:



According to the feedback received from participants of the focus groups, some previously unemployed individuals have begun seeking employment opportunities. Young people working in international companies highlighted that their employers started to appreciate Ukrainian employees more and made accommodations to working conditions because of the power outages or air raids.

Relocation Plans: Moving Within and Outside of Ukraine

Paradoxically, despite the hardships and the large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the share of young people who choose to remain in Ukraine increased to 66% in 2022 from 48% in 2021. This shift may be attributed to a rise in patriotic feelings and an improvement in social cohesion.

Every **5th** young person in Ukraine is an IDP.

16% of those that evacuated abroad or to another region came back

³ The highest scoring response to this survey question was “Problems related to power outages – 46%”, however, at the moment of publication the relevancy of this question was decreased and the response was omitted.

However, it is important to note that a significant number of young people have already left the country, and many of those who remained did not have any intention of relocating in the first place. There is no significant gender difference in responses to relocation intentions, but age does seem to play a role, as younger respondents were more likely to express a desire to leave compared to their older counterparts.

Most Common Pre-Conditions for Returning

- Restoration of Water and Power Supply
- Absence of Mass Shelling
- End of Military Activities in the Country
- Restoration of Infrastructure
- Demining of Territories
- Investments into Local Economy

When asked about their preferred destination if given the opportunity to move, a third of the respondents expressed their interest in relocating to countries within the European Union, while 19% expressed their desire to move to a different oblast or city within Ukraine. However, another third of the respondents were unable to provide a specific response, indicating that they either had loose plans or no concrete plans at all. Young people that had to evacuate from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in 2014 and who experienced forced migration twice, indicated that they were not ready to go back to Ukraine or their original places of residency.

Around **55%** of IDPs plan to relocate back to their original places of residency.
Among those that left the country, **76%** plan to come back to Ukraine

Young People that Want to Leave Their Current Location (disaggregated by age)



Actions for Policy Makers and Civil Society

1. Invest into local infrastructure renovations, including housing and public spaces
2. Create local economic opportunities for young people, especially in the areas with highest rates of migration, whether by creating jobs or providing entrepreneurship funding.
3. Establish strong communication around such opportunities, meeting young people where they are (top 3 most used news sources: Telegram, YouTube, Instagram)

THE STATE OF VULNERABLE YOUTH AMIDST FULL-SCALE INVASION

Roma Community

Despite some positive changes in attitudes towards Roma people at the national level, witnessed through national quantitative studies, some Roma youth have faced difficulties enlisting due to discriminatory attitudes and a lack of necessary documents. However, Roma individuals have successfully integrated into the military, although their experiences are influenced by their economic and social status. The war has also had negative economic impacts on Roma youth, including the loss of opportunities for labor migration and decreased wages due to an increase in the IDP labor supply. On top of it, crossing the border became a separate problem for many young men that participated in seasonal migrant labor due to the inability to leave the country. Many young women and children were not able to evacuate to the neighboring countries due to the absence of necessary identification documents.

LGBTQ+ Community

Some members of the community have reported that the full-scale invasion has reinforced negative attitudes, frustration and anger towards the LGBT group. However, there have also been positive experiences of solidarity and mutual support, with LGBTQ+ soldiers being seen as positive representatives of the community and collective action in the face of a common enemy helping to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

"To avoid, so to speak, a scandal, the person who was distributing humanitarian aid said: "Either leave or come back later, because people are causing a scene." He had to leave, and when the people dispersed, there was nothing left, that is, he was left without assistance. This is bad, very bad, because he doesn't have a job." –

LGBTQI+ representative speaking about another member of the community

The profile of the activities of Ukrainian LGBTI+ organizations has shifted to more humanitarian efforts such as organizing shelters, providing food, medicine, and legal and psychological consultations. During the war, many community members do not consider LGBTI+ rights activism a priority due to the ongoing conflict and may backfire and exacerbate hostility towards the community. However, others see an urgent need to address issues such as medical decision-making, access to healthcare, and child custody and property rights that affect LGBTI+ people.

Youth with Disabilities

The war has exacerbated problems for young people with disabilities, primarily in terms of access to medical services and medications. Participants in a study reported a shortage of doctors and necessary medications in Ukrainian pharmacies, logistic difficulties in obtaining medical care, and shortened deadlines for medical tests due to power outages. Forced migration to other countries has caused difficulty in finding new doctors and navigating medical bureaucracy in a foreign language. People with disabilities face additional obstacles, such as street lighting and traffic lights being turned off, creating risks for visually impaired people. Disabled elevators during power outages also caused social isolation

and additional barriers in accessing services. However, for some, the continuation of remote learning and work during the COVID-19 pandemic provides advantages because remote work and learning are more comfortable in an urban environment that is not adapted to their needs.

Intolerance of Vulnerable and Stigmatized Groups⁴

	2021	2022
People with addiction to injectable drugs	72%	76%
People with alcohol addiction	48%	61%
Formerly incarcerated people	46%	44%
Roma community representatives	44%	35%
LGBTQI+ members representatives	31%	28%
People living with HIV/AIDS	18%	20%

Actions for Policy Makers and Civil Society

1. Despite the improvements in attitudes towards vulnerable groups, such groups bear tougher and often invisible burden of war. Design program to specifically target these groups and facilitate their access to legal, medical, and other administrative services.
2. Make healthcare more easily accessible for people with disabilities, with a focus on expansion of telehealth services.
3. Communicate to the public how vulnerable groups are participating in the protection and recovery of Ukraine through most commonly used sources of information (Telegram, YouTube, Instagram).

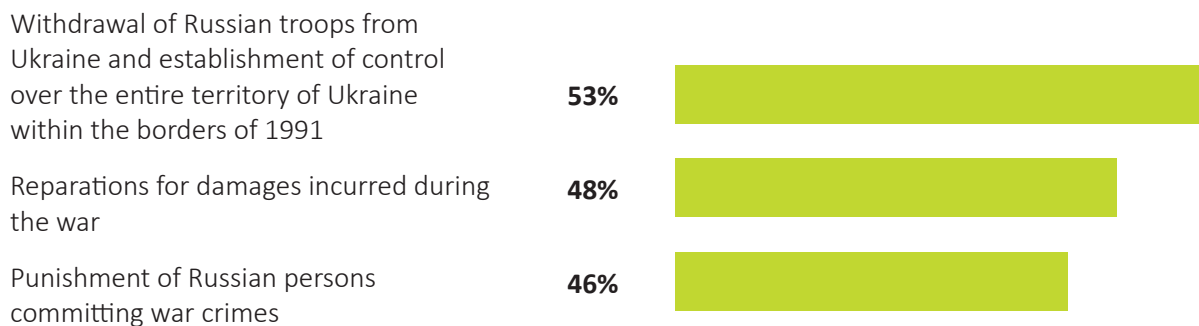
⁴ Below are the responses to the question “Which groups of people would you find unacceptable to live next to?”

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON ENDING WAR AND PRE-CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

91% of young people express their support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, including the non-government-controlled territories that were annexed after 2014, as an indispensable requirement for establishing peace.

Only **2%** find it acceptable to establish peace under the conditions that Ukraine ceases the territories it does not control at the moment

Most frequently mentioned conditions for ending the war and establishing peace:



The study participants unanimously rejected the idea of yielding to Russian demands to end the war. During the focus group discussions, they expressed their belief that agreeing to the conditions set forth by the aggressor state, such as Ukraine's neutral status, a change in political leadership, or recognition of territories controlled by the Russian Federation as parts of Ukraine, would not be effective steps towards achieving peace and should not come at its expense.

During discussions on ending the war and conditions for achieving peace, participants expressed concerns about the possibility of future military aggression, which could lead to a continuation or repetition of the ongoing conflict. Therefore, establishing long-lasting and reliable peace for the younger generation not only means ending the current war but also creating conditions that prevent its recurrence.

Regarding the Ukrainian government's efforts to regain control over the uncontrolled territories, participants in the focus groups raised the issue of integrating the residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as Crimea, which have been outside the Ukrainian government's control since 2014. The discussions highlighted the complexity of the process, including potential losses among Ukrainian military personnel and difficulties in integrating residents from these regions, who have lived in a different political culture for a long time. Additionally, there are challenges in integrating the children who were born and raised in non-government-controlled territories (NGCA) into Ukrainian society.

Young women and men consider Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO as security guarantees.

In 2022, **80% (+21%)** support joining NATO

85% (+28%) support joining EU

Approximately half of young women and men in Ukraine expressed disapproval of living next to a citizen of Russian Federation – a 41% from 2021 survey results. Participants of focus group discussions have a uniformly negative view of Russia as an aggressor and an enemy. They believe that Russia deserves international isolation and that it should not have relations with Ukraine or the world at large. Those who are critical of the Putin regime and condemn the war are more likely to maintain relationships with Russians who share their views. Some participants also suggested a complete isolation from Russian citizens and the Russian state, believing that the crimes committed by Russian citizens are unjustifiable and that Ukrainians should avoid any interaction with them, even with relatives or former close ones.

According to the survey, around 72% of the respondents favored the idea of boycotting Russian cultural products, while 20% expressed opposition to this approach. However, the responses varied significantly depending on the region, with regions in the East showing less support for the boycott. Additionally, age was also a factor, with younger respondents showing less support for this approach.

Actions for Policy Makers and Civil Society

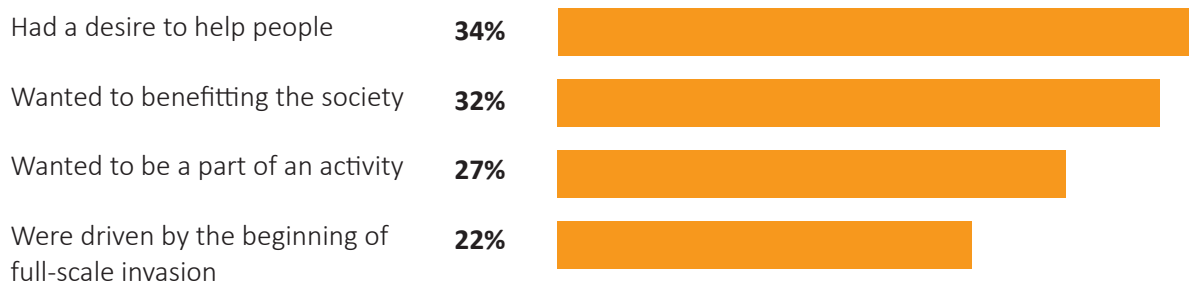
1. Integrate youth voices and opinions must be reflected in the negotiations and peacebuilding processes. Implement UNSC Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security into development and recovery plans at central, regional, and local levels. Youth must be an active participant of any peace discussions and negotiations processes.
2. Initiate mediation and social cohesion activities at a local level, particularly in areas with high concentration of IDPs to reduce the tensions that may arise from regional differences in attitudes towards Russian content consumption
3. Scale-up and offer on initiatives like “Dialogues of Victory” that allow young women and men voice their opinions and cast their vision of Ukrainian future, that would translate into concrete steps and actions.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Youth Volunteerism

From the start of the full-scale invasion, young people in Ukraine have been tremendously active in volunteering and fundraising for military and humanitarian needs. Around 30% of surveyed youth participated in volunteerism for the first time, in comparison with 6% that volunteered for the first time in 2021. Popular volunteer activities among youth include providing physical assistance on the ground, helping the military, NGOs, or refugees, as well as fundraising and organizing humanitarian aid. Of those who volunteered, 43% did so because of a personal desire, 27% were motivated by friends or relatives, and 7% were influenced by online information.

Factors That Motivated Young People to Volunteer:



Young people expressed willingness to volunteer in the future, but not all of them can make it their primary activity. Some respondents also felt the need to be invited to volunteer. Some respondents clarified that they are not physically ready to volunteer, but are willing to contribute financially, while others are ready to volunteer in areas directly related to their main area of activity.

Youth Inclusion in the Peace and Recovery Process

The vast majority of young people (72%) are willing to contribute to community recovery efforts, yet only 1% are currently actively involved.

During the focus groups, participants expressed their insights regarding the barriers that impede their participation in community recovery processes. These barriers include:

- Insufficient representation of young people in government institutions.
- Lack of accessible tools for civic participation.
- Bureaucratic hurdles that discourage and hinder engagement.

At the same time, when asked about their interest in joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF), only 10% of male respondents said they are considering the idea, with 18% having attempted to join and 9% currently enlisted. Among women, the number of enlisted is significantly lower, with only 4% reporting to be currently serving in the UAF.

62% of young people are not considering joining Ukrainian Armed Forces:

41% among men

83% among women

Civil and Political Activism

Youth participation in civil society institutions over the past 12 months has also been quite low, with the majority of respondents (70%) not participating in any of the activities.

	2021	2022
Volunteering organizations and initiatives	8%	16%
School or University student government	12%	8%
Charitable or humanitarian organizations	7%	8%
Cultural, educational, or scientific organizations	9%	6%
Athletic or leisure organizations	9%	4%
Youth or children civil society	5%	3%
Youth councils	4%	2%

Youth engagement in political parties and associations also remained low – less than 1% of those surveyed are active participants of such institutions, though 7% participate in their events (without becoming members).

Ways to Stimulate Youth Civic Participation

47% suggest creating youth projects

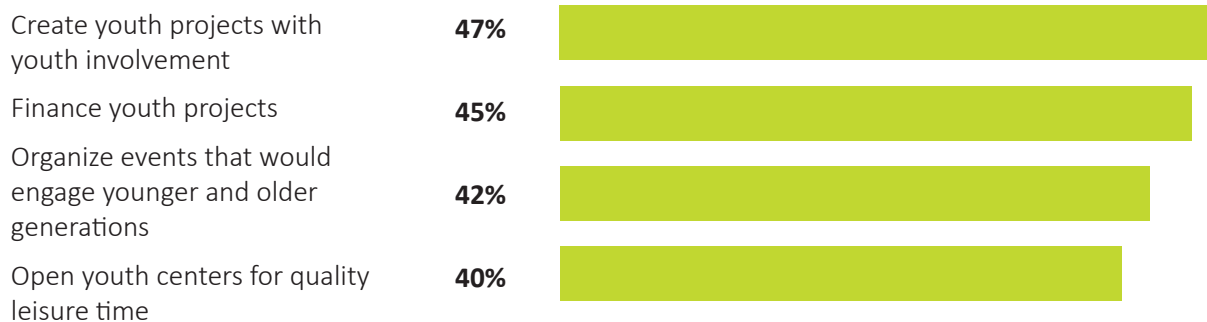
45% support providing financial assistance to youth

Participants in the focus group discussions had different views on the civic participation of young people. Some mentioned the possibility of signing petitions and using other instruments of civic participation and talked about their involvement in them. However, there were also passive attitudes and perceptions expressed, such as young people having little leverage to influence government bodies in general, with people in power being able to make decisions unilaterally. Due to these reasons, some participants do not plan to engage in similar activities in the future.

70% of respondents

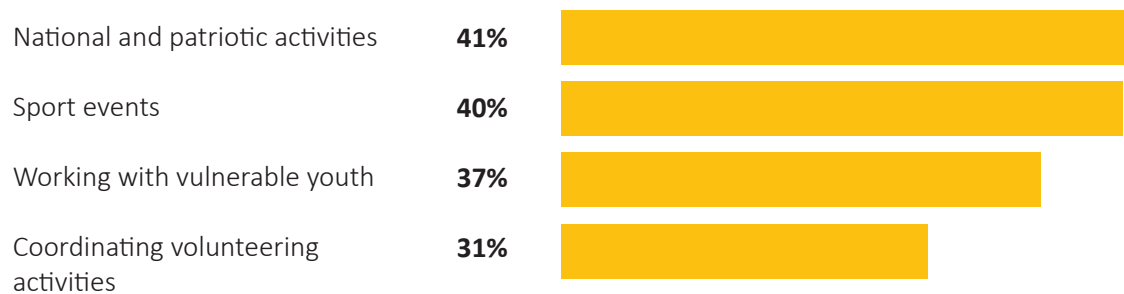
are confident that young people in Ukraine can safely participate in local decision making offline or online

Youth believes that the following steps would improve youth civic engagement



Youth Centers: Awareness and Involvement

Most Popular Recommended Services for Youth Centers



In 2022, **43%** of young women and men know about the existence of youth centers (+10%), but only 6% are members or participate in the events

Actions for Policy Makers and Civil Society

1. Develop youth policy with youth participation (“no decisions about youth without the youth” principle) using existing youth infrastructure (e.g. youth councils) at the local levels and create other mechanism for tangible and impactful youth participation.
2. Unpack the recovery process and ensure that young people are being informed about ways on how to contribute/participate.
3. Scale up programs that finance youth recovery initiatives.
4. Ensure that there are mechanisms in place enabling of meaningful youth engagement in the recovery planning at all levels.
5. Engage youth through diverse communication channels that go beyond official websites and include platforms, such as Telegram, YouTube, and Instagram.
6. Make youth civic and political participation visible through different media channels to normalize having young people at decision-making roles (e.g. profile existing young politicians and community activists) and to demonstrate to other young people that it is possible to start a fulfilling public career early.
7. Establish effective platforms for dialogue between youth and government and show tangible results of such cooperation to shift the thinking that political participation of youth is meaningless or ignored.
8. Support already existing youth recovery initiatives, like Repair Together, “Dobrobat”.
9. Use local community networks to spread information about local volunteering and activism opportunities.

