

MEMORANDUM

Re: Civic Education: The Path to Societal Change in Ukraine

From: Pact Inc

To: Interested parties

Date: February 28, 2017

Background

The main prerequisite for civic education development is the deliberate intention of citizens to build and strengthen the liberal democratic foundations in society and institutions. In the last three years, Ukraine has undergone intense transformational changes across all spheres of society. The most painful changes took place when breaking with “old” norms and values, and special efforts were taken to revitalize democratic institutions and to establish human rights and rule of law. But democracy is not a vehicle that can drive itself. It requires constant enhancement of civic knowledge, skills and dispositions of citizens, and a conscious effort to transfer them from generation to generation. The experience of Western civic education of the past century has shown that public institutions and the state of law are functioning more efficiently and smoothly if they are composed of competent people who are united around the intent to preserve and strengthen democracy and freedom in society.

There are multiple definitions and use of the term “civic education” both in academia and in everyday use. The Council of Europe (CoE) defines civic education as activities aimed to give students the means ***“to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.”***¹ From the practical point of view, civic education is less about knowledge, and more about competencies and skills that are the foundation of any social action and that are essential for civic life in a democratic society.

Although national strategies for civic education may differ, the CoE has identified three common fundamental themes:

1. **Political literacy:** an adequate understanding of the structure of modern society and the state.
2. **Critical thinking** and **solidarity:** responsible citizens should have an independent political position, but civil behavior should be focused on the strengthening of solidarity in a society based on respect for others and other viewpoints.
3. **Active participation/engagement:** social cooperation and responsibility for the society is seen as an essential practical knowledge, attitude and communication skill of the responsible citizen.

¹ Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education // <http://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>

The concept of a *responsible citizen* is a key element in the pedagogy of a United Europe.

Western model of civic education

Civic education in Western countries is seen foremost as an indispensable part of primary and secondary education, that is, directed to those young citizens who are preparing for adulthood as fully enfranchised citizens. In other words, for those who will soon acquire new rights, duties and freedoms, school forms the initial civic foundation (knowledge and understanding of the nature of the liberal-democratic society and the rule of law). School performs this task, in part, through a specialized curriculum on citizenship (variously named *ethics, social studies or social science, civics/ citizenship education*). This subject is associated with ambitious outcomes, such as knowledge of the constitution, law, human rights, models of civic participation and the duties of a responsible citizen.

Higher education deepens that knowledge and tests it in practice through student participation in elections, involvement in the life of local communities, social assistance, volunteering, etc. Mechanisms and forms of attracting young people to participate in political life vary from country to country. In Poland, non-governmental organizations play a key role. In Germany, increasing young people's participation is carried out by discussions on political issues. In the UK, young people are engaged through youth parliaments and elected youth leaders of communities.

Currently, the development of civic education is undergoing significant changes. In addition to the transition from direct to interdisciplinary teaching, a new trend is to focus not so much on the transfer of knowledge (formal education), but rather on training in methods of discussion and information, conflict resolution and negotiation, and skills of social actions and interactions. These skills are better addressed through extra-curriculum activities. A famous example is Tocqueville's often quoted observation that local political engagement is a form of civic education: *"Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and how to enjoy it."*

Ukrainian Context

In the early 1990s, many observers were optimistic that post-communist civil society would develop quickly. However, most of the recent literature acknowledges the slow pace of development. One main hindrance seems to be the lasting imprint of communism, which polarized individuals and crushed civil society whenever possible. Dramatic events during the last three years rallied the population of Ukraine and softened differences on some of the most crucial issues, such as a pro-European orientation and NATO-membership support². However, socio-economic instability and inefficiency of reforms in the economic and anti-corruption domains are preventing civic consolidation and contribute to the lack of awareness of Ukrainians as a unified people. Furthermore, Ukrainian society desperately needs to break with paternalism and increase citizen initiatives and self-organization.

Data

According a national poll conducted by Pact in 2016, as much as 20 percent of the Ukrainian population is ready to participate in public activism of some kind, such as signing petitions or

² Political results of 2016 national poll // <http://dif.org.ua/article/2016-y-politichni-pidsumki-zagalnonatsionalne-opitivannya>

serving on public committees. There is a large distinction based on age, however, with older citizens more inclined to participate (20%) than younger citizens (12%)³. There is a clear gap in civic competencies (knowledge, skills, experience), which constitutes a real obstacle for broader citizen engagement and participation in the political process. The main constraints for both age groups are a lack of time and lack of awareness about existing opportunities to participate. Time constraints are most likely explained by the necessity to work and earn income; the lack of awareness reflects general lack of knowledges about how to defend one's rights. There is also often a lack of trust in one's ability to effect change.

Although civic knowledge does not necessarily lead to civic engagement, the two are interrelated. If students are well informed about the values and processes involved in democratic governments, it is more probable that they will participate in one way or another in political life (e.g. joining a political party, voting, organizing civic initiatives in their communities). The opposite also seems to be true, in that civic knowledge is the result of participation in civic life. Several studies have shown that involving students in public policy analysis and decision making is an effective way to develop their knowledge base and their willingness to participate in civic life⁴.

A civic literacy survey conducted in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova shows that the most preferred skills that Ukrainians want to build are: to protect their rights and interests (30 percent), as well as critical thinking, business development and conflict solution (9 percent each).

Have you ever received training on citizens' rights and/or skills (lectures, training programmes, etc.)?
Have you ever read materials on civic and legal issues? % of all respondents, N = 1994



Most respondents express a willingness to obtain new skills and knowledge but have limited access to opportunities.

Respondents are mostly young, better educated and enjoy better financial status. Slightly more women are interested to receive civic education than men (57 percent and 43 percent, respectively). City residents are significantly more interested to receive civic education than rural residents (71 percent vs. 29 percent)⁵.

Main drivers

Civic educators are people who believe that providing information to others and/or creating opportunities for others to learn are paths to greater civic competency and a better future. In most Western developed countries, civic education has long been autonomous and is not in the literal sense a "servant" of civil society. In contrast, the main engines of civic education in Ukraine are civil society organizations (CSOs) focused on creating and maintaining the

³ Public Opinion Survey to assess the changes in citizen's awareness of civil society and their activities // https://pactworld.app.box.com/files/o/f/11433621171/1/f_96012158426

⁴ Benilde García-Cabrero, María Guadalupe Pérez-Martínez, Andrés Sandoval-Hernández, Joaquín Caso-Niebla, Carlos David Díaz-López. Assessing two theoretical frameworks of civic engagement // Journal of Social Science Education .- Volume 15, Number 1, Spring 2016. – P.39

⁵ Civic literacy in Ukraine // <http://dhrp.org.ua/en/news/1616-20161216-en>

system of civil (public) control and non-violent social change. However, CSOs alone cannot meet the needs of the broader citizenry. The more ambitious goal should embrace (a) the establishment of a responsive educational system, (b) design and implementation of a civic education curriculum, and (c) communities' network-building.

Donor activity in the civic education

In Ukraine, projects related to civic education have been supported by donors such as Pact/ENGAGE, IRF, USAID, UNDP, European Commission, Black Sea Trust, U.S. Embassy, MATRA, CIDA, DVV-International, GIZ, Embassy of Norway, Embassy of Poland, Embassy of Switzerland, British Embassy, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, U.S. Peace Corp, IFES, NDI, IRI, USAID/FAIR, Project Harmony, IREX, and EED. It is important to rely not only on existing institutional assets, but also the synergy of donor efforts.

Purpose of the USAID/ENGAGE Project

USAID/ENGAGE Activity to Enhance Non-Governmental Actors and Grassroots Engagement understands civic education as the **competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) required to be an active, democratic, responsible and critical citizen**. The ultimate goal of USAID/ENGAGE is to facilitate an understanding by children and their parents of the need and importance of the rule-of-law state and civil society as its partner. Our idea of civic education is not restricted to formal education, but also includes non-formal education and practical experience.