



CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA

OVERVIEW

Ukraine is home to robust civil society and independent media sectors that actively engage with policymakers and state institutions, provide citizens with information about pressing political and social issues, and empower society to advance reform and solve community problems. The country also has a growing culture of volunteerism, demonstrating the commitment of Ukraine’s citizens to improve conditions in their communities and in the country at large. This work is critical as Ukrainian society strives to strengthen its political and rule of law institutions and achieve further Euro-Atlantic integration. Civil society organizations advocate for the needs and interests of Ukrainians and empower citizens to become more civically active, while independent media is a critical source of information and a counterweight to pervasive disinformation that aims to undermine public confidence in democratic processes. These areas have become even more important following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Civil society organizations provide critical support to people affected by the war, while independent media outlets ensure that Ukrainians and the outside world have accurate information about Russia’s invasion.

Despite notable progress, civil society and media organizations often lack the financial sustainability, influence, and training to effectively function at the national and local levels. Due to undeveloped domestic funding sources, these sectors are still largely dependent on international funding and greater domestic funding would strengthen local ownership and increase public confidence in them. This challenge is exacerbated by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has eroded the domestic resource base, while increasing the need for community-level action. To address these challenges, USAID funds activities to promote financial sustainability, build capacity, and further empower civil society and independent media to contribute to Ukraine’s independent, democratic, and European future.

OBJECTIVES

- Foster the development of a strong civil society sector in Ukraine that holds elected officials and state institutions accountable, promotes reforms, and empowers citizens, especially young people, to contribute to positive change.

- Help Ukraine’s independent media sector become more financially sustainable and better equipped to inform the public about key issues.

OUR ACTIVITIES

MEDIA

USAID’s Media Program strengthens the independent media sector’s ability to promote civic engagement and democratic processes by expanding citizens’ access to fact-based information about key social and political issues. Notably, USAID assistance supports institutionalization of the public service broadcaster, promoting accountability in the media; helps outlets create high-quality, engaging content that is fact-based; expands media literacy; and strengthens key media institutions and processes. USAID works with a range of organizations to develop content on public interest topics that engage and educate audiences and bolster public debate on critical issues. USAID also supports efforts to increase media literacy, including by making it part of the national school curriculum at all levels. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Media Program provided safety equipment, tactical first aid training, relocation, and operational support to help Ukraine’s independent media outlets continue to provide potentially life-saving information to citizens.

TRANSFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS

USAID’s Transformation Communications Activity (TCA) promotes collaboration among government, commercial media, the creative sector, and civil society to create and disseminate high-quality, data-driven media and communications content to engage domestic and international audiences most vulnerable to disinformation, a critical function amid Russia’s full-scale war. To that end, TCA has strategically embedded communications specialists to help several high-level GoU elements reach inaccessible audiences and leveraged animated film, social media, international art exhibits, and many other mediums to provide accessible and factual content to every target demographic in Ukraine and several abroad. By addressing social issues and countering disinformation through positive narratives, USAID aims to shift the national conversation away from division and skepticism and toward constructive dialogue that bolsters democratic development and civic equality. TCA supported the “Postcards from Ukraine” campaign to raise global awareness of Russia’s destruction of Ukrainian cultural and historical sites. The campaign reached more than 7 million people on Facebook and Instagram.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

USAID fosters civic activism and strengthens the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to empower citizens, ensure civic oversight, and promote reforms by increasing civic engagement in policy making, building the institutional capacity of CSOs, and promoting greater cooperation across regions and between local and national stakeholders. USAID’s Enhance Non-Governmental Actors and Grassroots Engagement activity promotes greater citizen awareness and participation in civic actions. The activity focuses on enhancing civic education, supporting civic initiatives, improving CSO organizational capacity, and fostering the long-term sustainability of civic engagement as a key driver of democratic reform, with a special focus on anti-corruption efforts and messaging. USAID RADA Next Generation (RANG) supports members of parliament (MPs) voter communication hubs through NGO partners, allowing MPs to provide more and better relocation, humanitarian, and other forms of aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and businesses. An example is during Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, when the Dnipro and Pavlohrad municipalities provided an IDP hotline which has proven particularly effective, having processed 2,541 appeals from IDPs from Kramatorsk, Slovyansk, and Bakhmut.

CSO INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

USAID’s Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity strengthens the self-reliance of the civil society sector by advancing the organizational capacity of CSOs, and building their resistance and adaptability to

wartime conditions, including to provide high quality services to citizens. During Russia’s full-scale war, this activity has supported 77 Ukrainian civil society organizations to collect and distribute 66 tons of humanitarian aid to more than 500,000 IDPs. Stronger organizational capacity ensures robust institutional governance, financial management, strategic and contingency planning, fundraising, response to humanitarian needs, security, and resilience. The activity also promotes legislative initiatives that strengthen civil society through more effective advocacy campaigns that improve the legal environment for civil society and promote Ukrainian interests abroad.

JUSTICE SECTOR

Through the Justice for All (J4A) activity, USAID works closely with Ukrainian counterparts to equip and empower civil society and citizens to hold the justice system accountable and advocate for meaningful judicial reform. To that end, J4A supported a series of five capacity-building seminars that developed CSOs representatives’ ability to meaningfully contribute to the vetting process for nominees to the High Council of Justice and High Qualifications Commission of Judges. Through the vetting process, J4A -supported CSOs will impact more than 2,000 judicial selections and have a long-term impact on the future vetting, selection, and evaluation of judges and prosecutors. J4A also supports justice institutions and civil society to effectively investigate and adjudicate war-related cases of gender-based and sexual violence in line with the needs and expectations of survivors. USAID-supported CSOs provided virtual and in-person legal, humanitarian, and psychological assistance to more than 7,800 displaced and war-affected persons in Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Kharkiv and Odesa Oblasts. The Justice for All Activity additionally engages CSOs in comprehensive legal education reform, including addressing corruption risks in legal education.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The goal of USAID’s Ukraine National Identity Through Youth (UNITY) activity is to foster among Ukrainian youth a sense of ownership in the country’s independent, democratic, and European future by mobilizing youth leaders around a Ukrainian identity grounded in innovation, engagement, and pluralism. Ukraine’s youth, who are generally more in favor of reform and Euro-Atlantic integration than are members of older generations, can play a critical role in cementing a values-based concept of Ukrainian citizenship. Through various interventions, UNITY is stimulating Ukrainian youth to take a leadership role in preserving Ukraine’s democracy, promoting European values among their peers and to older generations, helping youth to become more civically and economically engaged, to be able to identify and solve different problems, and to lead Ukraine to continue making progress in overcoming various humanitarian challenges while enabling democratic consolidation.

During the full-scale war, UNITY pivoted efforts towards the more immediate needs of Ukrainian youth. This included engaging nearly 60,000 young people in activities to strengthen Ukraine's resilience and address critical issues facing communities. Since the start of Russia’s full-scale war, USAID-supported youth volunteers have helped more than 900,000 people across Ukraine by coordinating and delivering humanitarian assistance, working at displaced persons shelters, staffing call centers, supporting education for children and teenagers, and much more.

USAID RANG assisted the Parliamentary Education Center in implementing its wartime strategy. Ninety educational events with 30,000 participants have been conducted since Russia’s invasion. Additionally, RANG established and developed a network and curricula for parliamentary civic education with 40 educational institutions in 14 Ukrainian regions. The curricula, “Our Parliament: Research, Understand, Influence,” resulted in collaboration between the Parliamentary Education Center and teacher-training networks in target regions.