

Policy Labs #5

Report



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THE TOPIC OF THE 5TH POLICY LAB WAS GROUNDED IN THE FOLLOWING PRESUMPTION

Ukraine, which restored its independence in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has been developing its democratic institutions and civic engagement while facing foundational challenges and the ongoing war. In contrast, Western Europe, with centuries of democratic tradition, confronts issues of democratic maturity, including voter fatigue, disillusionment, and the rise of radical political movements.

Unlike some post-Soviet states, Ukraine made notable progress in the 1990s, including peaceful transfers of power and the establishment of democratic institutions, albeit with significant challenges. Two pivotal moments—the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and the Revolution of Dignity (2014)—reflect the Ukrainian people's aspirations for freedom, justice, and democratic governance. These revolutions were responses to entrenched corruption and authoritarian tendencies, signaling a popular demand for democratic accountability and rule of law¹.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, and grassroots movements have emerged as vital actors in Ukraine's democratic development, particularly in the face of institutional weaknesses and wartime challenges². These organizations perform multiple functions: they monitor government transparency, advocate for anti-corruption measures, provide social services, and mobilize citizens for democratic participation³. The Euromaidan Revolution and subsequent reforms catalyzed a surge in civic activism, with CSOs embedding oversight mechanisms into their work and collaborating with government institutions to promote accountability^{4,5}.

The challenges of democracy in Ukraine and Western Europe, though distinct, reflect the complexities of democratic development at different stages of maturity. Ukraine's nascent democracy confronts foundational challenges including corruption, oligarchic influence, and the devastating impact of war, yet demonstrates resilience through vibrant civil society engagement and international support. Western Europe's mature democracies face internal discontent, voter fatigue, and the rise of radical political movements that threaten democratic stability. Ultimately, the future of democracy in both regions depends on the ability to address these challenges through inclusive, transparent, and responsive governance that fosters civic engagement and trust. The lessons from Ukraine's democratic struggles and Western Europe's democratic fatigue offer valuable insights for policymakers, civil society actors, and international organizations committed to preserving and enhancing democratic governance globally.

POLICY LABS BY ERSTE FOUNDATION

Policy Labs are regular three-day, professionally moderated workshops that bring together approximately thirty experts from Ukraine and across Europe, maintaining a balanced representation. These workshops delve into thematic areas relevant to the overarching topic. Adopting methodologies standard to workshops, Policy Labs shape discussions, gather insights, and document newly generated ideas with the approval of all expert participants. Each Policy Lab concludes with a comprehensive report, and this is the fifth issue on the topic »Empowering Voices: Citizens' Role in Shaping Ukraine's Future«, the fruit of the Lab that took place on June 25–27, 2025.

5th POLICY LAB: Empowering Voices: Citizens' Role in Shaping Ukraine's Future 25–27 June 2025, Vienna

Prior reports were dedicated to the following themes:

- The preservation of cultural heritage (30 November–2 December 2022).
- The support to social resilience, emancipation, trust building and well-being (12–14 April 2023).
- Build the capacity of the CCS to support Ukraine's recovery (15–17 November 2023).
- Sustainable Governance of Public Interest Institutions in Times of Polycrisis (24–26 April 2024).

So far, all five Policy Labs have taken place at ERSTE Foundation premises. The concept for Policy Labs originated from the initiative and dedicated work of Yana Barinova, in collaboration with ERSTE Foundation—a philanthropic organisation associated with the largest private bank in Austria, long known for its support of social innovation, culture and art, and particularly the financial well-being of the non-profit sector. The Policy Labs project was initiated in 2022 as an independent platform for knowledge exchange between Ukrainian and international experts. The first two workshops were implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Over time, the thematic focus expanded beyond the Culture and Creative Sector, addressing broader issues and challenges. Today, Policy Labs serves as a meeting point and think tank for analysing critical problems and navigating the complex challenges facing Ukraine. It functions as a dynamic knowledge hub, fostering dialogue, generating innovative solutions, and shaping strategies for Ukraine's sustainable development and global integration. The Policy Labs methodology is developed and implemented by KEA European Affairs which also contributed to the identification and participation of international experts.

The war and its tragic consequences for people, urban fabric, diverse cultural expressions, landscape, and well-functioning institutions are the central and recurring theme of Policy Labs. However, considering global issues that even war-torn countries cannot escape, we address climate change, just transformation, technological shifts, and threats to democratic institutions.

Hence, the idea behind Policy Labs aims to yield tangible results in the form of:

- reports that thoroughly illuminate the situation on the ground in Ukraine,
- new ideas born through direct offline collaboration,
- fostering motivation for decision-makers to initiate appropriate changes.

One of Policy Labs' strengths lies in the presence of representatives from government and local authorities. They can scrutinise proposals and directly benefit from ideas generated through the collective intellect of the participants.

THE AIMS OF POLICY LAB 5

Policy Lab 5, titled »Empowering Voices: Citizens' Role in Shaping Ukraine's Future,« aimed to explore and address the multifaceted challenges of post-war recovery in Ukraine. Held from June 25–27, 2025, at the ERSTE Foundation in Vienna, Austria, the workshop underscored the importance of rebuilding beyond physical infrastructure, focusing instead on restoring trust, strengthening communities, and ensuring that all residents, referred to as »citizens« in this report, have a voice in shaping their future. The term »citizen« is used inclusively to represent all individuals living in a given place, regardless of official registration status. The event aimed to delve into how democratic participation, shared experiences, and collective decision-making can empower Ukrainian society throughout its recovery process. By examining how communities come together and the role of citizen-led initiatives, the workshop sought to identify tools necessary for meaningful and lasting engagement. Through moderated discussions, the Policy Lab 5 explored practical approaches to democratizing decision-making, addressing trauma, and building a shared vision for the future. Key definitions were drafted to guide these discussions, including reconstruction, recovery, citizen engagement, and democratisation, each emphasising the comprehensive and inclusive nature of Ukraine's path to resilience and democratic governance.

METHODOLOGY

The Policy Lab 5 workshop was structured to facilitate in-depth discussions and collaborative learning over a three-day period. The event brought together 27 participants from the European Union and Ukraine.

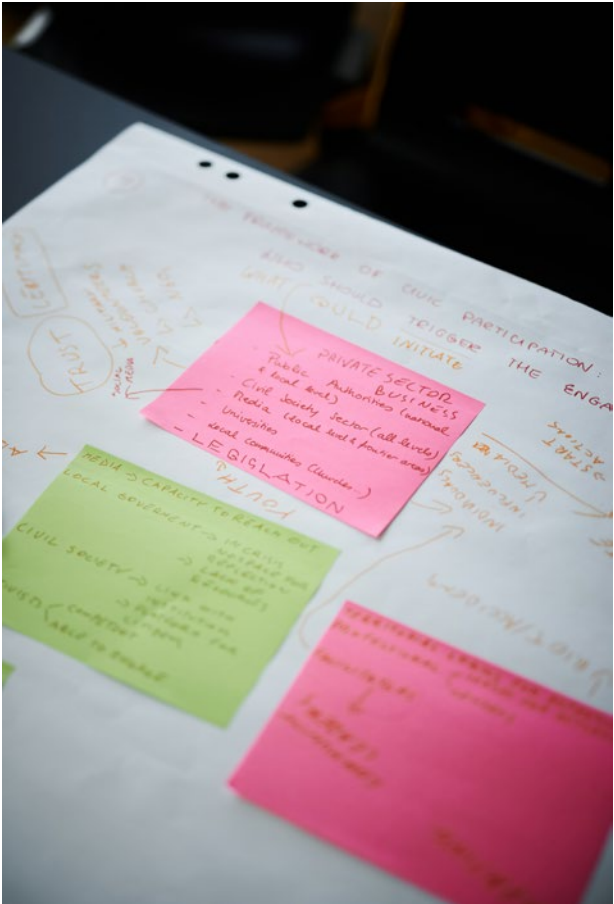
The workshop was divided into key thematic sessions, each designed to address critical aspects of post-war recovery and democratic engagement:

1. Rebuilding Social Bonds
2. Tools for Citizens to Shape Democracy
3. Building a Shared Future in Ukraine and Europe

The workshop employed World Café and panel discussions as facilitation techniques to encourage active participation and comprehensive discussion.

*World Café: This method involved participants discussing topics at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically. Each table had a host who summarized the previous discussion for new participants, ensuring that insights were carried forward and built upon. This approach allowed for a dynamic and inclusive exchange of ideas, fostering a sense of collective ownership over the outcomes.

The culmination of the workshop was the development of draft policy recommendations. These recommendations were presented on the final day, followed by a validation session where participants collectively reviewed, discussed, and refined the proposals to ensure they accurately reflected the workshop's insights and consensus.



Session 1: Rebuilding Social Bonds

On the first day, June 25, the focus was on »Rebuilding Social Bonds.« The aim was to delve into the practical support needed for citizens, NGOs, and grassroots organizations to thrive in Ukraine's recovery. The session was moderated by Philippe Kern (KEA European Affairs, Belgium) and featured panelists Bogdan Kelichavyi (Mayor of Kopychyntsi Municipality, Ukraine), Olga Myrovysh (Lviv Media Forum, Ukraine), Piet Forger (the City of Leuven, Belgium), and Inna Pidluska (International Renaissance Foundation, Ukraine). Bogdan Kelichavyi shared insights into the dual role of local government in both top-down and bottom-up approaches. He highlighted initiatives such as organizing a children's scouting program and relocating a charity foundation, emphasizing the need for programs to educate citizens on working with city councils. Inna Pidluska discussed the shortage of human rights organizations and the importance of participatory approaches to reconstruction and recovery. Piet Forger shared principles of policy-making, emphasizing bottom-up approaches and community engagement. Olga Myrovysh stressed the critical role of media in providing information and the challenge of disinformation.

The Q&A session brought up interesting points about the relationship between universities and city councils, the value of information, and the power of giving a voice to those who feel unrepresented. The World Café discussions explored the importance of citizen engagement, the institutional capacity needed for engagement, the appropriateness of civil engagement, and the key actors in triggering engagement.

Session 2: Tools for Citizens to Shape Democracy

On the second day, June 26, the theme was »Tools for Citizens to Shape Democracy.« The session aimed to identify practical policy tools and strategies to empower citizens to participate in decision-making. Liubov Halan from the Human Rights Centre for Military Personnel »Pryncyp« (Ukraine) delivered a presentation on the role of veterans as citizens and nation-builders. The panel discussion that followed featured Markus Lux (Robert Bosch Foundation, Germany), Vanessa Kogan (Araminta, Germany), Vladyslav Greziev (»Zminotvortsi« (Changemakers), Ukraine), and Anton Drobovysh (Human Rights and War Memorialization Center of Kyiv School of Economics, Ukraine), who shared insights on supporting vulnerable groups and the importance of understanding veterans as role-model citizens. The World Café discussions focused on creating willingness to participate, establishing the possibility of engagement, the institutional capacity needed for engagement, and engaging with power and municipalities.

Session 3: Building a Shared Future in Ukraine and Europe

In the afternoon of June 26, 2025, the session titled »Building a Shared Future in Ukraine and Europe« took place, focusing on how Ukraine's journey toward European integration can serve as a catalyst for strengthening democratic institutions and fostering a resilient democratic mindset. This session was designed to explore the multifaceted dimensions of Ukraine's European aspirations and the broader implications for democratic resilience and community-led initiatives.

The session featured two prominent speakers, Mateusz Pachura from the Solidarity Fund (Poland), presented »Bridges at the Border: Navigating Civic Engagement in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood« and Marianna Kuzemska-Danyliuk from Cedos (Ukraine), presented »Cities We Shape, Cities That Shape Us: Culture, Participation, and Urban Belonging«.

Mateusz Pachura delved into the challenges and lessons learned from civic engagement in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, with a particular focus on countries such as Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. He highlighted the complexities and opportunities of fostering civic engagement in regions with diverse political and social landscapes. Pachura emphasized the importance of building bridges—both literal and metaphorical—across borders to enhance cooperation, understanding, and shared democratic values. His presentation underscored the need for strategic approaches to navigate the unique challenges faced by these countries, promoting a more integrated and collaborative future within the European framework.

Marianna Kuzemska-Danyliuk explored the transformative role of culture and participation in shaping urban environments and fostering a sense of belonging among citizens. She discussed how cities are not just physical spaces but also hubs of cultural expression and civic engagement that can drive democratic values and community cohesion. Kuzemska-Danyliuk's presentation highlighted the importance of participatory urban planning and the role of cultural initiatives in creating inclusive and vibrant communities. She shared examples of successful projects and strategies that have empowered citizens to actively participate in shaping their urban landscapes, thereby strengthening democratic institutions and promoting a shared sense of identity and purpose. The final day, June 27, was dedicated to drafting policy recommendations, as presented in the following chapters. The session aimed to develop practical and actionable policy recommendations to strengthen democratic institutions, promote civic engagement, and support Ukraine's recovery and European integration.

Policy Recommendations

PRINCIPLES OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Citizen engagement (CE) is a crucial component of democracy, complementing democratic representation. It safeguards and enhances democracy by making both citizens and authorities more responsible and critical. CE helps address disinformation, burst bubbles, combat polarisation, and prevent autocratic pushbacks. It allows citizens to influence and complement the state. However, it is essential to remember that democratic methods can sometimes be employed for undemocratic purposes. Therefore, the following principles are essential to ensure that citizen engagement functions effectively and channels citizen energy positively. The principles of citizen engagement are the agreed-upon standards that we consider essential for effective civic participation. These characteristics make citizen engagement a worthy goal to strive for and nurture. The following principles motivate us to take action.

<u>Principle</u>	<u>Description</u>
Social cohesion	CE serves to strengthen social cohesion, helping to build a cohesive society.
Human rights and Rule of Law	CE is founded on human rights and the rule of law as its driving principles.
Community building	CE supports community building, fosters solidarity, and creates a sense of belonging, resilience, and confidence. It helps in forming a collective identity.
Self-empowerment	CE empowers individuals, protecting their dignity and helping address disappointments.
Ownership	CE enables citizens to take ownership of initiatives and processes.
Trust building	CE builds trust through interactions with different groups, institutions, civil servants, the private sector, and diaspora communities abroad.
Learning and knowledge	CE improves learning and knowledge, promoting informed citizenship and understanding of how politics and public policies work.
Collective memory and shared future	CE helps build a collective memory that continues despite political changes. It also aids in imagining a positive collective future based on a shared identity.

Civic behaviours	CE improves civic behaviours, such as tax collection and respect for public goods, and makes authorities more responsive to citizen needs.
Resource mobilisation	CE helps mobilise resources, entrepreneurial ideas, and social innovation, especially in times of need like war efforts.
Better decision-making	CE leads to better decision-making, policy design, and enforcement. It also aids in the design of public infrastructure, as seen in examples like the Ukrainian hospital system functioning effectively in long-term emergency modes.
Capturing needs	CE captures needs and helps to collect data to identify and address priorities.
Co-design of policies	CE enables the co-design of policies, supports local actions, and increases accountability and transparency of the public authorities.
Transformation	CE creates conditions for mutual (citizens and the public authorities) influence and transformation.

ELEMENTS OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The following are the conditions under which CE can function effectively to achieve the most desirable outcomes. Subsequent sections will describe methods to achieve these conditions. Here, we outline the components that enable an environment conducive to citizen engagement. Together, these elements create ideal conditions, but each point should also be considered an individual goal.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Elements</u>
	<u>Context</u>
Conducive environment	This includes the willingness and political disposition to engage, a belief in democracy and CE, as well as a supportive legal environment.
Institutional capacity mapping	Understanding and leveraging the capacity of institutions to support CE.
Proactive citizens and environment	An environment that encourages and incentivizes proactive citizenship.
Education and awareness	Citizens should be educated and aware of their rights, have hope, believe in democracy, and feel a sense of belonging in their community.
Community capital and engagement	Building and utilising social capital within the community to foster engagement.

Build Trust

Transparency	Ensuring openness in processes and decision-making.
Accountability	Holding individuals and institutions accountable for their actions and decisions.
Flow of information	Ensuring a steady flow of information, building expertise, and relying on data.
Inclusiveness strategy	Ensuring engagement across all demographics, including different ages, genders, veterans, LGBTQ+, internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants, and those with physical and mental health challenges.
Address trauma and injustice	Recognising and addressing past and current traumas and injustices within the community.
Engage good facilitators	Utilising skilled facilitators to guide and enhance engagement processes.
Identify »gatekeepers«	Recognising and involving trusted community representatives, such as veterans.

Management

Flexibility and open-mindedness	Being adaptable and open to new ideas and approaches.
Identify the subject of CE	Recognising that not all topics are suitable for citizen engagement and identifying those that are.
Strong consultation process	Implementing robust processes for consulting with citizens.
Accept time and cost	Understanding that effective CE can be time-consuming and costly, but also recognising the high costs of not engaging citizens, as outlined in the »Principles of citizen engagement« section above.
Receive mandate to act	Gaining the authority and mandate to follow up on initiatives and act on citizen input.

Recommendations



The subsequent three chapters present practical tools designed to advance the ideals of the elements (see Elements of citizen engagement), thereby reaping the benefits of the principles (see Principles of citizen engagement).

We have divided these recommendations into three target groups:

- Citizens and civil society
Here, we recommend steps to be taken by individuals and non-governmental organisations, foundations, and informal associations representing societal interests in relation to sectoral actors such as the public sector and corporate sector.
- Donors
In this, the shortest yet equally significant chapter, we focus on the community of donors, including global philanthropy. We aim to emphasise the necessity of communication between donors and beneficiaries and, consequently, the need for updates in processes and priorities on the part of donors.
- Public authorities
In this section, we address representatives of governing bodies at all levels. Through their administration, management, and influence over various tiers of government, these representatives can strive to create conditions that foster citizen engagement and simultaneously derive mutual benefits from this involvement.

Before delving into specific recommendations tailored to each target audience, it is essential to outline certain foundational principles that are universally applicable to all three groups. These principles serve as the bedrock upon which effective strategies and actions should be built.

- Celebrate and share Ukrainian achievements
All stakeholders should take pride in the accomplishments of Ukraine and actively share the narrative of resilience and functionality despite facing multiple vulnerabilities. By highlighting these achievements, valuable lessons can be disseminated to other countries and societies, fostering a global culture of learning and solidarity.
- Build on existing foundations
It is crucial to take stock of the current situation and build upon existing frameworks and resources. Avoid the inclination to »reinvent the wheel.« Instead, focus on leveraging and enhancing what has already been established. This approach not only conserves resources but also ensures continuity and stability in ongoing efforts.

- Address cyberwarfare and digital threats
In an increasingly digital world, awareness of cyberwarfare and digital threats is paramount. Stakeholders must prioritise cyber-security measures and be vigilant against disinformation. Always provide reliable, data-backed information to counteract false narratives and ensure the integrity of communication channels.
- Advocate for transparency and accountability
Transparency and accountability are critical for building trust and ensuring the effective implementation of policies. Advocate for open communication and clear accountability mechanisms within and across organisations. This principle helps to foster an environment of trust and cooperation, which is essential for achieving collective goals.

I. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES TO SUPPORT CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT FOR CITIZENS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

This chapter outlines actionable guidelines designed to bolster citizen engagement through the concerted efforts of individuals and civil society organisations. By adhering to these recommendations, stakeholders can effectively contribute to societal progress and resilience.

1. Organise into civil society organisations, networks, or informal groups that strive towards common goals. These groups can be temporary and do not require a specific legal status to be effective.
2. Encourage individual initiatives that are backed by collective decisions. Assist others in organising and share successful examples of informal groups and initiatives, including those focused on emergency response and environmental improvements.
3. Utilise available tools to communicate and highlight the needs of your community effectively.
4. Investigate and build upon the achievements of other organisations. Engage in knowledge exchange and sharing, both within Ukraine and internationally. Foster horizontal cooperation between various civil society actors to maximise impact.
5. Earmark resources specifically for data collection to build organisational expertise. Provide data-backed reports that highlight needs and propose solutions.
6. Normalise citizen engagement through effective branding and marketing. Utilise media outlets to showcase successful examples and encourage broader participation.
7. Engage in cross-sector cooperation, such as initiatives that combine culture with public health, to create comprehensive and innovative solutions.
8. Be proactive in offering services to municipalities, provided that the municipalities have the necessary infrastructure to accept and utilise these services effectively. Refer to the subsequent chapter

for further details on this collaboration.

9. Develop the capacity to demonstrate discontent and advocate for necessary changes. This involves not only voicing concerns but also presenting well-researched alternatives and solutions.

II. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES TO SUPPORT CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT FOR DONORS

This chapter provides strategic recommendations for donors, focusing on the need to adapt to the evolving landscape of civil society and to enhance the effectiveness of their support.

1. Shift focus from capacity-building to organisational development (OD). Civil society organisations often express fatigue with traditional capacity-building initiatives. Instead, focus on organisational development, which involves strengthening the overall effectiveness of an organisation. This includes improving strategic planning, leadership, internal systems, and sustainability, rather than just enhancing specific skills or capacities.
2. Regularly update your giving agenda to reflect current needs and priorities. This requires staying informed about the latest developments, challenges, and opportunities within the sectors and communities you support.
3. Ensure that your funding is timely and responsive to emerging needs. Quick and flexible funding can be crucial in addressing urgent issues and capitalising on new opportunities.
4. Be aware of global threats and trends that may impact the organisations and communities you support. This includes understanding the broader socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts.
5. Improve your own Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation, and Learning (MEAL) programmes to better assess the impact of your funding and to adapt your strategies based on learning and evidence.
6. Assist your beneficiaries in establishing robust MEAL systems. This support is crucial for small, on-the-ground organisations that may lack the resources to develop these systems independently. By building MEAL capacity at the beneficiary level, you can ensure that your support is effective and that organisations can demonstrate their impact.
7. While large intermediary organisations play a vital role, do not overlook the importance of supporting smaller, grassroots organisations. These organisations often have deep community ties and unique insights that can drive significant change.
8. Provide longer-term funding. There is a growing fatigue among organisations with the administration and uncertainty associated with short-term grants. To foster stability and allow for sustained project development and implementation, consider offering grants that last at least two years. Longer-term funding enables organisations to plan more effectively, invest in their development, and achieve more significant impacts.

III. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES TO SUPPORT CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

In the recommendations for public authorities, the initial and crucial step preceding any proactive measures is the removal of barriers. At the outset, it is essential to consider whether internally displaced persons (IDPs) or returning citizens encounter administrative obstacles that hinder their full enjoyment of civic rights and, consequently, their ability to exercise the right to engagement. Examples of such barriers include issues related to the registration of new addresses and access to public services, the ability to vote and express opinions on an equal footing with others, and even social ostracism driven by the political climate. It is imperative to pay experts and NGOs for their engagement, addressing concerns regarding low pay and working conditions within civil society and among experts.

Subsequently, we propose three categories of proactive steps for public authorities at various levels: implementing mechanisms to identify needs, incentivising citizen engagement, and adapting operations. Where applicable, we specify the relevant level of governance.

Implement mechanisms to identify needs

1. Build upon existing knowledge to save time and resources. Start by understanding what is already known and apply these insights effectively.
2. Regularly reassess and redefine the needs of the community to ensure that interventions remain relevant and effective.
3. Identify (map) key stakeholders and potential leaders who can drive initiatives forward.
4. Offer both physical and digital platforms for knowledge and data sharing, as well as for public hearings.
5. Ensure that accurate data is collected and disseminated to inform decision-making and public awareness.
6. Encourage the co-creation of policies and foster a sense of ownership among citizens, as people are more likely to support changes they have helped shape.
7. Help underrepresented groups organise and establish representation to ensure their voices are heard.
8. Utilise media outlets to communicate and highlight the importance of these initiatives.

Incentivise citizen engagement

1. Create a compelling and emotional narrative about the importance of democracy and citizen engagement, involving the media to amplify this message.
2. Ensure that the legal framework adequately enables citizen engagement and be open to feedback for continuous improvement.
3. Provide support to civil society organisations and sector representatives to strengthen their capacity for engagement.
4. Be open-minded and supportive of local innovators and entrepreneurs, such as citizens developing community projects.
5. Offer both physical and digital spaces and tools to facilitate engagement.
6. Introduce participatory budgets, awards for successful participatory projects, voucher systems, tax credits, and other rewards to encourage participation.
7. Showcase successful examples of citizen engagement to demonstrate impact and inspire further participation.

Adapt operations

1. Municipalities need a legal framework to accept services from civil society. Advocate for this change at higher policy levels if necessary.
2. Assess current situations and available assets to inform planning and decision-making.
3. Designate a specific officer responsible for coordinating and promoting citizen engagement initiatives.
4. Engage experts and intermediaries to moderate and facilitate engagement processes.
5. Establish councils dedicated to overseeing and advancing citizen engagement efforts.
6. Implement Monitoring, Evaluation, Adaptation, and Learning (MEAL) frameworks to assess the effectiveness of engagement initiatives. Maintain transparency regarding the projects that are supported to build trust and accountability.
7. Share knowledge and projects across different departments to foster a collaborative approach.
8. Continue to engage the media to publicise initiatives and successes.

9. Utilise public-private partnerships and scale up successful projects to maximise impact.
10. Leverage Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC). Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) involves the interaction and coordination between civilian and military actors in a crisis or conflict situation. It aims to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and development efforts by ensuring that military operations support and do not hinder civilian activities. Public authorities should leverage CIMIC to enhance collaboration and resource-sharing, ensuring that civilian needs are met efficiently and effectively in complex environments.

FINAL REMARKS

BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE: PROPOSAL FOR BETTER EU SUPPORT

Ukraine's journey towards European Union membership represents a significant step in its commitment to aligning with European values and standards. As Ukraine progresses on its pre-accession path, it is essential for the European Union to provide robust support that reflects this evolving partnership. This chapter outlines key proposals aimed at enhancing EU support for Ukraine, ensuring that assistance is both impactful and aligned with local needs, thereby fostering a collaborative environment conducive to Ukraine's integration into the EU.

Grant rules

1. Treat Ukraine like an EU country in terms of grant rules. This includes eliminating co-funding requirements for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which can be a significant barrier to participation.
2. Adopt more flexible eligibility criteria to accommodate the diverse range of organisations operating within Ukraine. This flexibility will enable a broader spectrum of entities to access funding and support.
3. Aim to reduce the response time to grant applications to 3-4 months. Faster processing will allow organisations to implement projects more swiftly and respond to urgent needs more effectively.

Empower local organisations

1. Focus on supporting the organisational development of local entities. This includes providing resources for functional reviews and skills development to enhance their capacity and effectiveness.
2. Rely more heavily on local expertise to build strategic advice and develop programmes. Local experts possess invaluable insights and understanding of the context, which can significantly enhance the relevance and impact of initiatives.
3. Invest in mentoring and coaching programmes to build the capacity of local organisations and individuals. These programmes can provide ongoing support, knowledge transfer, and skill development, contributing to the long-term sustainability and success of initiatives.

Implement small grant programmes

Structure grant programmes to avoid large consultancies taking a substantial portion of the funds. Instead, prioritise direct support to smaller, local organisations that are closely connected to the communities they serve.

Enhance consultation with local stakeholders

Request and implement better consultation mechanisms with local stakeholders, including the Council of Europe (CoE). Effective consultation will help to more accurately identify needs and develop strategies that are well-aligned with local realities and priorities.



Annexe 1 Agenda

WEDNESDAY MORNING, 25.06.

Welcome and introduction

8:15 – 8:40	Welcome coffee
8:45 – 9:00	Opening remarks
9:00 – 10:20	Introduction of the participants to the lab, their professional expertise and their expectations (first roundtable)
10:20 – 10:30	Presentation of the format of the event.
10:30 – 10:50	Coffee break
10:50 – 11:00	Welcome remarks from Andreas Treichl, the Chairman of the Board of ERSTE Foundation

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 25.06.

	<u>Lab 1: Rebuilding social bonds – Why citizen engagement matters</u>
11:00 – 12:00	1st panel discussion
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch
13:00 – 14:40	Session 1 – World Café
	Theme focus: Exploring the importance of citizen – engagement, trust – building and meaningful social ties in today's society.
14:40 – 15:15	Reporting from the World Café
15:15 – 15:30	Coffee break
15:30 – 16:00	Wrap up and Q&A
18:00	Dinner

THURSDAY MORNING, 26.06.

	<u>Lab 2: Citizens shaping democracy – Tools for engagement</u>
8:45 – 10:30	Guided tour of ERSTE Group Corporate Collection Contact and welcome coffee
10:30 – 10:40	1st presentation
10:40 – 11:40	Panel discussion
11:40 – 13:00	Session 2 – World Café
	Theme focus: What kind of practices, including institutions can actively shape democratic life through participatory tools and inclusive processes.
13:00 – 13:20	Reporting from the World Café
13:20 – 14:15	Lunch break
14:15 – 14:20	Wrap up and Q&A

THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 26.06.

	<u>Session 3: Sustaining change for everyone – Building a shared future in Ukraine and Europe</u>
14:20 – 14:30	2nd presentation
14:30 – 14:35	Q&A
14:35 – 14:45	3rd presentation
14:45 – 14:50	Q&A
14:50 – 16:00	A moderated plenary discussion
16:00 – 16:20	Coffee break
16:20 – 16:30	Wrap up and final reflections

FRIDAY MORNING, 27.06.

10:00 – 10:30	Welcome coffee
10:30 – 10:45	An intervention from the European Commission representative
10:45 – 11:15	KEA to report on the outcomes of the various plenary sessions and propose a series of draft recommendations linked to the topics for discussion in a plenary to reach consensus
11:15 – 12:30	Draft recommendations on policy: plenary discussion
12:30 – 12:40	Wrap up from main moderator
12:40 – 12:45	Main conclusions and closing remarks
12:45 – 14:00	Buffet lunch



Annexe 2

List of Participants

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 The Aleppo Project (Syria)
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 Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy at the
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Anton Drobovych
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 nomics (Ukraine)
Benoit Willemaers SJ
 Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC) (Belgium)
Bogdan Kelichavyi
 Mayor of Kopychyntsi Municipality (Ukraine)
Francesco Nelli
 Municipality of Bologna (Italy)
Inna Pidluska
 International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) (Ukraine)
Julia Kolomak
 Coalition of Culture Actors (Ukraine)
Liubov Halan
 Human Rights Centre for Military Personnel «Pryncyp» (Ukraine)
Maciej Bagiński
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Maryna Kulinich
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