

**Globalization and Regionalization**

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**ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY RESOURCES
TO COMBAT THE THREATS
OF THE CORONA CRISIS IN TIMES
OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

Abstract

In the context of Ukraine's European integration aspirations, the authors summarise the results of European research on challenges, trends, obstacles and opportunities for civil society organizations (CSOs) in European countries in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The considerable potential of digitalization is highlighted in terms of creating a new environment for CSO operation, where sustainability would be ensured even in the face of health threats or *force majeure*. This is the basis the authors use to establish the context within which they explore the problems and opportunities of engaging civil society resources in Ukraine to stabilise the socio-economic conditions in the country. Having systemised and generalised the outcomes of national and expert surveys conducted in Ukraine, the authors reveal: (1) the main trends of changes in the operation of

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Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) in the current conditions and the public opinion regarding these issues; (2) the impact of the corona crisis on the operation of Ukrainian CSOs and civil engagement; (3) problems and opportunities of developing institutional support for engaging the potential of civil society (CSOs) in digital transformations in Ukraine and in CSOs using modern digital and information and communication technologies. The conducted investigation makes it possible to present a comprehensive assessment of the current conditions and prospects for engaging the resources of Ukrainian CSOs in combating the threats of the corona crisis and future post-pandemic recovery, as well as to set priorities in the development of CSOs in times of digitalization.

Key words:

Civil society resources; civic engagement; new challenges, threats of the COVID-19 pandemic; digital transformations; Ukraine; EU countries.

JEL: H80, L31, L86, M14, O20, O38.

4 figures, 23 references.

Problem Statement

Topicality of research. Today, Ukraine is one of the leaders in the post-Soviet space in many key indicators of democracy and the growing role of civil society institutions. This is especially noteworthy in the critical period of significant external and internal threats to social welfare. The country already has a strong non-governmental public sector, and its institutions – various public and volunteer structures – enjoy a consistently high public trust of Ukrainians.

The development of Ukrainian civil society is a sign of strengthening democratic values. It is a condition for the success of European integration processes and a guarantee of growing trust and strengthening social capital within the country, proof of real citizen participation in governance. This process to

some extent depends on the nature of interaction between the main social actors – the state, business, government, citizens; on their readiness and willingness to constructively solve urgent problems on the basis of partnership, mutual understanding, and responsibility. The importance of social resources of constructive interaction and public engagement grows every day, becomes a necessary condition for sustainable and secure development, becomes especially relevant in times of systemic crises, dangers, instability, etc. An active and consolidated civil society can help create opportunities for sustainable and secure development of the country, its regions and people.

In recent years, Ukrainian civil society has repeatedly demonstrated the significant potential of Ukrainians' inclination toward cohesion, joint social action, and constructive self-organization, which is of particular value in the face of the risks and threats of the COVID-19 pandemic. The corona crisis has caused a significant increase in the number of initiatives based on digital solutions, as well as a review of the current digital agenda by relevant authorities, large technology companies, volunteers and businesses around the world (Institute for Statistical Studies and Economics of Knowledge (ISEEK), 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic became a powerful trigger for the processes of digital transformation (ISEEK, 2020) and significantly accelerated them, in part through social self-organization.

Thus, the latest conditions have heightened the demand for research on the functioning of civil society organisations (further – CSO), on trends in changes in their activities in times of digitalization and overcoming of consequences of corona crisis. This demand is further enhanced by the influence of other key trends of today, significant threats, and the dynamics of democratization.

The aim of the article is to identify the main challenges, problems and opportunities in engaging the resources of Ukrainian civil society for the purpose of overcoming the threats of the corona crisis in the context of digital transformations, taking into account the relevant European experience.

In particular, the chosen aim poses three objectives that must be achieved.

1) Review European research addressing the challenges, barriers and opportunities CSOs face in times of COVID-19 pandemic threats. In the context of Ukraine's European integration aspirations, such a review sets the vector and creates the necessary context for further research into the possibilities of attracting civil society resources in Ukraine to counter the negative consequences of the corona crisis and further post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

2) Summarize the results of research conducted in Ukraine to determine the current conditions, problems and opportunities for the functioning of civil society organizations in the context of the corona crisis and digitalization.

3) Analyse the institutional support for engaging the civil society potential in the processes of digital transformations in Ukraine in recent conditions.

Literature Review

Taking into account Ukraine's European integration aspirations, it is expedient to generalize the results of European research, which reveals the challenges, trends, obstacles and opportunities of CSOs in European countries in the context of the pandemic. It should be noted that the number of studies, analytical reports, and recommendations on the impact of the pandemic on CSOs in the EU is very high, especially at the national level. Unable to grasp all this diversity, we decided to focus on large-level research concerning the EU as a whole.

For example, one of the most extensive studies was *The Response of Civil Society Organisations to Face the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Consequent Restrictive Measures Adopted in Europe* (Tageo et al., 2021), which was conducted under the auspices of the European Economic and Social Committee (which is an EU advisory body). According to the study, both European institutions and national and regional governments were recommended to focus their political efforts and financial resources on the following (Tageo et al., 2021):

- stimulating and encouraging new solidarity and new forms of social action, while promoting links and mechanisms of cross-interaction between newly formed groups and CSOs;
- managing risks and taking advantage of digitalization;
- promoting youth engagement and innovation programmes to encourage community-based jobs;
- providing CSOs with the necessary resources and skills to reap the full benefits of networking, intra-national and international cooperation;
- reducing bureaucratic and administrative burdens;
- involving CSOs in the development of climate- and environment-friendly recovery plans.

Quite a lot of attention in the EU was paid to the preservation and development of the social control function of CSOs, the importance of which in the crisis has only increased. The study *Supporting Civil Society during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Potentials of Online Collaborations for Social Accountability* focused on these issues. (Mullard & Aarvik, 2021). The study formulated the key challenges for CSO activity in a pandemic and substantiated the opportunities for CSO activity in a pandemic. Interestingly, while the authors of this study recognized the difficulties facing the civil society, at the same time they noted that this can stimulate creativity and the search for new opportunities for CSOs to implement their activities. Emphasis was also placed on the need to use the ICT potential in CSO activities.

The key trends that reflect the main changes in the activities of CSOs in the EU in a pandemic were identified by the study *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic for the European Non-Governmental Sector* (Sassu & Vaş, 2020). The increase in solidarity and volunteering, the introduction of new flexible mechanisms of work and, again, a lot of attention paid to the potential of ICT in organizing the activities of CSOs in a pandemic.

In Ukraine, the problems of CSOs in a pandemic have received much less attention from the state (which, unfortunately, is the rule rather than the exception). However, this does not mean that the impact of the pandemic on Ukrainian CSOs has been completely ignored and not studied. Rather, in Ukraine the studies were smaller and funded by international grants, practically without the involvement of the authorities. Moreover, in order to see the bigger picture of the impact of the pandemic on CSOs in Ukraine, it is advisable to consider the problems of CSOs in a broader, not just «pandemic», context.

An expert survey *Civil Society in Times of Pandemic: How COVID-19 Affects Civic Engagement*, conducted in April-May 2020 among representatives of NGOs, was devoted to the impact of the pandemic on the activities of Ukrainian CSOs (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Charitable Foundation (IKDICF), 2020). It was performed within the *Join the Community Action Program*, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the Pact in Ukraine. Notably, most experts emphasized the need to develop partnerships in the complex environment created by the pandemic, with about half believing that the pandemic resulted in not only threats but also development opportunities, which, however, required the use of new technologies and remote interaction formats.

However, the data of this expert survey, intended for internal use, requires a broader context on the main trends that characterize the conditions and main problems of development of Ukrainian CSOs. In this sense, valuable sources of information and research include *Civil Society Assessment Barometer. Assessment of the Civil Society Environment in the Countries of the East Partnerships. Updates in Ukraine* (Ukrainian Independent Center for Political Studies, 2020), *Do It for Me: Ukrainians Are Ready for Self-Organization, but They Put the Responsibility for Their Well-Being on the State. National Survey on Public Engagement* (IKDICF, 2021a), *Civil Society in Ukraine: Public Opinion* (IKDICF, 2019) and others. Interestingly, at the local level, there has been a positive trend in the field of local democracy, as evidenced by the results of the study *The Pandemic Did Not Stop the Tools of Local Democracy in Ukraine, and Some Even Accelerated* (The Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, 2021). Thus, in the end, these studies provide a fairly comprehensive view of the conditions and main trends of development (or rather – of changes, because Ukrainian CSOs do not always develop progressively) of Ukrainian civil society, and create the necessary context for a more accurate assessment in the time of the pandemic that takes into account the specifics of Ukraine.

Based on the results of research, it can be noted that the activities of Ukrainian CSOs in a pandemic and quarantine restrictions have not been experienced any radical changes, either good or bad. Activity remains relatively stable (albeit slower than during the upswing after the Revolution of Dignity), and tends to progress rather than regress.

Research Results

The impact of the corona crisis on civil society in European countries and its consequences

Given the crucial role played by civil society institutions (CSOs) in the modern world, especially in developed countries, it is no surprise that much attention has been paid by both governments and researchers to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on civil society, on the activities of CSOs and various aspects of this impact. The main issues on the agenda were: (a) how the pandemic and related lockdown affected the activities of CSOs in terms of changing priorities, forms of implementation and the overall impact of the pandemic on CSOs; (b) determination of the role of CSOs in overcoming the negative consequences of the pandemic; (c) identification of the support CSOs need from partners (government, business) in order to preserve and engage their potential in overcoming the effects of the corona crisis.

Thus, under the auspices of the European Economic and Social Committee (which is an EU advisory body), a large-scale study *The Response of Civil Society Organisations to Face the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Consequent Restrictive Measures Adopted in Europe* was conducted (Tageo et al., 2021). The authors emphasize that CSOs are the ones responding to the unprecedented global public health crisis and social crisis rapidly by providing first aid and protecting the rights of people around the world. However, it was also found that CSOs themselves faced the effects of a pandemic, which could damage their ability to continue providing services, defending the rights and protecting the interests of citizens. This study investigated the effects of the pandemic on CSOs and their activities and identified measures taken by European countries to contain the corona crisis through the involvement of CSO resources. Additionally, it collected quantitative and qualitative data on the response of CSOs in Europe, including through an in-depth online survey of CSOs according to their field of activity and mission.

Thus, according to the results of the study, there were two main types of challenges: (1) societal challenges that the surveyed CSOs saw as the most

pressing issues raised by the pandemic in society, and which they helped to overcome; and (2) organizational, economic and political challenges faced by CSOs, which were a consequence of the state of emergency declared in most countries.

The most influential *societal challenges* included:

- disruptions to the provision of basic services during lockdown, with particular emphasis on disruption of certain health and caretaking services;
- a sharp increase in the number of people in a vulnerable socio-economic situation due to job loss, exacerbation of inequality and impoverishment;
- accentuation of discrimination, in particular ageism;
- lack of protection from domestic violence;
- deterioration of living conditions for people suffering from intellectual, mental, physical and other disabilities;
- the consequences of the digital divide, digital illiteracy and related inequalities in access to and ability to take advantage of remote (distance) learning, work and service delivery;
- threats posed by the pandemic to food supply and the reduction of agricultural labour force in certain regions;
- general disruption of economic activity, which had a significant impact on small and medium-sized enterprises and liberal professions, and in general – on trade relations and consumer habits.

The results of the study showed several main *organizational, economic and political* challenges faced by CSOs caused by the states of emergency and lockdowns were the following.

First, the need for an urgent transition to remote operation; in this regard, CSOs encountered varying degrees of readiness for this, insufficient digital literacy of employees and users, lack of appropriate digital tools, technical equipment, devices and infrastructure.

Second, rapid and significant increase in demand for basic CSO services in their communities due to the closure of many medical and social services (such services are usually provided by CSOs together with or under the auspices of public authorities) (shelters, food, primary goods, etc.).

Third, growing demand for information support of CSO information services aimed at obtaining clear, relevant and easily accessible information about

the pandemic, restrictive measures, provision of services to the population, and assistance.

Fourth, reduction of donations, inability of CSOs to organize mass fundraising events, lapse of membership fees due to the economic crisis, which significantly reduced the economic resources and limited assistance for many of CSOs, combined with the closure of many projects, activities and services that were an important source of income for them (Tageo et al., 2021).

Regarding the impact of the pandemic on CSO activities, the surveyed representatives of civil society organizations noted the limitations of mobility, the significant efforts necessary to implement new methods of work, and reduction or cancellation of certain operations, namely significant decline in face-to-face interaction and direct social interpersonal contacts. Loss of funding (as a critical moment) worries almost a quarter of respondents.

The authors of the study note that the role of CSOs in the next period of post-pandemic recovery will be significant, so there is a growing need to strengthen their capacity of ensuring a just, balanced and sustainable society. Therefore, it can be argued that the perception of CSOs as extremely important actors in the field of overcoming the pandemic and further recovery, and the need to support them in these conditions, is pan-European (which is fundamentally important for Ukraine given its chosen European integration vector).

The authors of this study made two general recommendations (Tageo et al., 2021). National and regional governments were recommended to establish an alliance with the social economy and other civil society actors and provide them with the necessary legal framework and resources to expand their innovative climate and environment-friendly solutions. European institutions were advised to promote balanced approaches that address both localization and coordination principles as key pillars of bringing recovery plans back to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The importance of using the potential of modern ICTs to sustain activities in a pandemic and quarantine environment has not gone unnoticed and is also reflected in the study *Supporting Civil Society during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Potentials of Online Collaborations for Social Accountability* (Mullard & Aarvik, 2021). The study focuses on the anti-corruption activities of CSOs in pandemic conditions (for Ukraine, in particular, with its very high level of corruption, this area of CSO operation is very important). The current crisis is noted to pose several challenges to civil society in such important areas of CSO activity as monitoring, accountability, advocacy and facilitating citizen engagement. These authors offer a slightly different view on the issue of CSOs in a pandemic and identify the following key challenges for CSOs in this new environment:

- asymmetry of power between executive and accountability mechanisms;

- restriction of movement, which prevents activities that require direct (physical) meetings;
- restrictions on access to information;
- expensive Internet services in countries with taxes on social media;
- difficulties in providing services and developing public initiatives;
- reduced capacity for civil governance.

These challenges must be addressed, however, several of new opportunities for CSO operation have been identified as well, namely:

1) increasing the legitimacy of civil society by engaging online reporters and activists who have strong links to the communities in which they live;

2) empowering citizens through online resources – CSO activities presented by hundreds of groups on Facebook or crowdsourcing projects that share information or organize assistance;

3) digitizing information – as society goals begin to interact digitally, information is likely to be available online or through official web portals and social networks;

4) creating new alliances – the current situation provides opportunities to interact with other types of civil society organizations, such as churches, scout groups, professional associations and other membership-based organizations;

5) establishing and developing a digital civil society, digital social activities, digital CSOs, focused on building their operations via the Internet;

6) mobilizing digital participation of citizens and involvement of resources of civil society through social networks, web resources, digital platforms, ICT.

Thus, using the potential of ICT becomes one of the key aspects of ensuring the stable operation and development of CSOs in times of a pandemic.

In a sense, certain trends in EU countries are crystallizing, reflecting the main changes in the activities of CSOs in a pandemic (Sassu, R. et al., 2020). First, as quarantine measures were introduced in most European countries, CSOs were forced to begin the immediate process of digitizing their activities and consider moving at least some aspects of their activities online. New community digital services were also introduced. This effect is likely to drastically change the work of NGOs in the post-pandemic world, as the use of digital tools will become part of everyday life along with online services that complement traditional community services.

Second, there has been a surge of volunteerism and solidarity in communities, both in organized and informal civil society. As CSOs complement the government's pandemic efforts, this could theoretically have a significant impact

on policy-making. In this regard, one of the long-term consequences of the pandemic may make NGO leaders more attentive to the resilience of their organization and ability to overcome shocks and move forward in times of crisis and uncertainty. Although it is too early to be certain, scenario planning, risk management, mitigation plans, and consolidated strategies that take into account the need for sustainability are likely to emerge.

Third, the trend that has emerged since the early stages of the pandemic, associated with increased flexibility in CSO funding mechanisms, may persist even after the end of the pandemic, as the need to strengthen the NGO sector will be greater than ever.

Fourth, increasing dependence of CSOs on local, national and European public funding can may become a risk, and may lead to a change in the strategy and priorities of the NGO, in order to follow the «government line» and avoid any criticism.

In summary, we can note two important points. The attention paid in the EU countries to the functioning and development of CSOs in the pandemic is extremely high. Further, most studies and reviews place a strong emphasis on the need to use the digitalization and ICT as a basic condition for maintaining the resilience and ability of CSOs to fulfil their mission in society in the context of the corona crisis.

The review of European trends in CSO pandemic activities creates the necessary context for further research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the possibilities for involving Ukrainian civil society in post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

The main trends in the operation of civil society organizations in Ukraine and the public opinion

According to official statistics, the number of civil society organizations (institutions) increased by almost 14% during 2017-2020. In particular, the increase in the number of legal entities: public organizations – by 12894 (from 75988 as of January 2017 to 88882 as of January 2020), public associations – by 728 (from 990 to 1718, respectively), charitable organizations – by 2275 (from 16837 to 19112), religious organizations – by 2275 (from 24072 to 26347), creative unions (and other professional organizations) – by 25 (from 292 to 317), trade unions and associations – by 1587 (from 26899 to 28486), self-organization bodies of the population – by 117 (from 1497 to 1614) (Government Portal of Ukraine, n.d.). However, despite some positive dynamics in the number of public organizations and associations in Ukraine, according to international and domestic

studies, there have been no significant qualitative changes to ensure real sustainability in the life of Ukrainian civil society.

For example, the International Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index recorded only a slight improvement in the organizational capacity of domestic CSOs, their financial viability, and development of public sector infrastructure in Ukraine during 2014-2019, but at the same time it revealed no significant changes in the involvement of these organizations (institutions) in providing socially useful services as prompted by public authorities and local governments (Government Portal of Ukraine, n.d.). That is, the degree of CSO involvement in solving socio-economic problems of Ukrainian society in conditions of increasing risks and dangers remains low.

Approximately the same is the general development of civil society in Ukraine, overview of which is provided in the international study *CSO Meter. Assessment of the Civil Society Environment in the Countries of Eastern Partnership. Updates in Ukraine* (Sydorenko & Latsyba, 2020). Its results showed that some positive changes have occurred in terms of freedom of association and state support, but there have been no significant qualitative changes with regards to equal treatment, access to funding, state protection, cooperation between the government and CSOs.

The situation has deteriorated in areas such as freedom of peaceful assembly, the exercise of the right to participate in decision-making, freedom of expression, the right to privacy, partially due to the objectively necessary restrictions used to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This to some extent explains the public opinion on the democratic development of the country and the involvement of civil society and citizens in these processes. Thus, according to the results of a nationwide survey conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Charitable Foundation and the Razumkov Centre's sociological service in the summer of 2021 (IKDICF, 2021b), development indicators of democracy and civil society were among the categories that underwent positive transformations over the 30 years of independence of Ukraine according to the respondents. Priority areas of successful transformation included (IKDICF, 2021b)

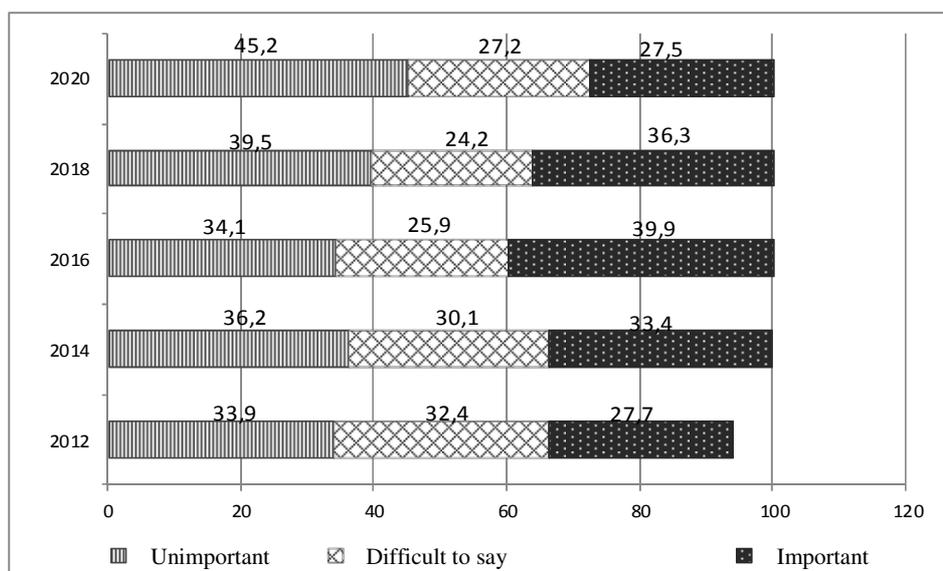
- ensuring equality of men and women (52% of respondents believe so),
- affirming freedom of speech – 46,7%,
- building democracy – 45,8%,
- establishing the Ukrainian nation – 45,2%,
- developing civil society – 41,5%
- protecting human rights and freedoms – 37,2%

This distribution has shown that the democratic relations are important for Ukrainian citizens as an element of their quality of life, and the relevant transformations are assessed in a positive way.

The results of other national surveys specify the above-mentioned choice of the country's citizens, in particular regarding their public engagement and involvement in CSOs (Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2020). For instance, the results of sociological monitoring of Ukrainian society revealed trends in verbal assessments of the population regarding the importance of their own participation in the activities of political parties and public organizations (Fig. 1).

Figure 1

Answers to the question: «Assess the degree of importance of participating in the activities of political parties and public organizations PERSONALLY FOR YOU» from 2012 to 2020, percent



Source: designed by O. Pankova on the basis of the data of Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (2020).

The obtained data indicate a significant decline in 2020 in the importance of guidelines for participation in the activities of CSOs by the population – over two years estimates decreased by almost 12% (in 2018 – 36.3% compared to 27.5% in 2020). The figures for 2012 and 2020 were almost identical – 27.7 and 27.5%, respectively. Such changes in assessments were caused by the corona crisis and restrictive measures to prevent infection with the COVID-19.

Indicators of awareness and participation of citizens in public events by their self-assessments make it possible to identify public opinion polls on changes in awareness of the Ukrainian population about public organizations and their activities (USAID, 2020). For example, seven out of ten Ukrainians (70.8%) are aware of the possibility of participating in peaceful assemblies on specific issues. The vast majority of Ukrainians (70.0%) are also aware of the possibility to inform local authorities about infrastructure problems in person or by phone, while 66.4% of respondents know about the creation and participation in house, street or neighbourhood committees. Citizens are least aware of the forms of civic activity that require some experience and expertise, such as participation in an official advisory body to local or state authorities (41.2%) or commenting on bills at the state and local levels (41.2 %) (USAID, 2020).

The results of the survey showed that every third Ukrainian states that he regularly or rarely participates in the meetings of his community (32% of respondents answered so). A much smaller share of citizens indicated that they participate in the activities of public organizations (19%). Forms of public engagement among those respondents who participate in the activities of CSOs were involvement in the work of public committees (8.4%), participation in public hearings (6.7%) and peaceful assemblies (6.2%), filing complaints on infrastructure issues (5.7%) and initiating electronic petitions to the mayor, district or regional council, president, etc. (4.7%).

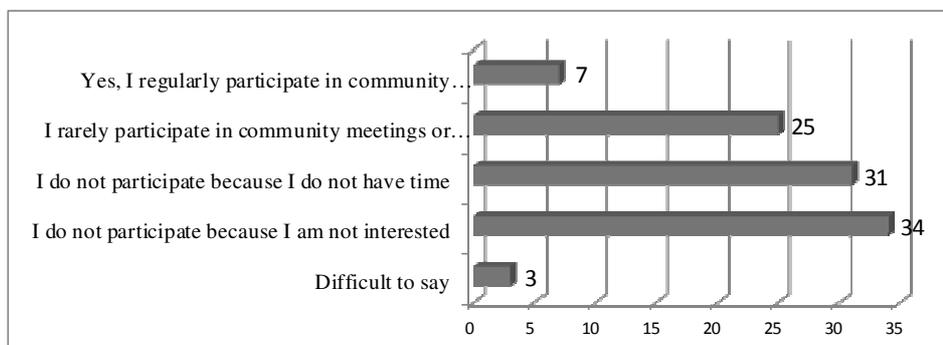
The reasons for low public engagement lie in the lack of time for this (31% of respondents) and lack of interest in this type of activity (34%) (Fig. 2).

The results of the study provided very valuable information on the disclosure of incentives and motivators for the involvement of Ukrainian citizens in the activities of CSOs. Priority is given to:

- 1) own interests and family interests (individualized position) – 35% of respondents;
- 2) effectiveness of one's own civic engagement – 29%
- 3) deep sympathy for people in need – 21%
- 4) trust in the leaders of public initiatives – 19%
- 5) coordination of goals of public initiatives with own goals and interests (political ambitions, PR, career) – 18%
- 6) involvement of the social circle in public initiatives will encourage the choice and public activity – 18%
- 7) desire to meet like-minded people – 14% (Fig. 3).

Figure 2

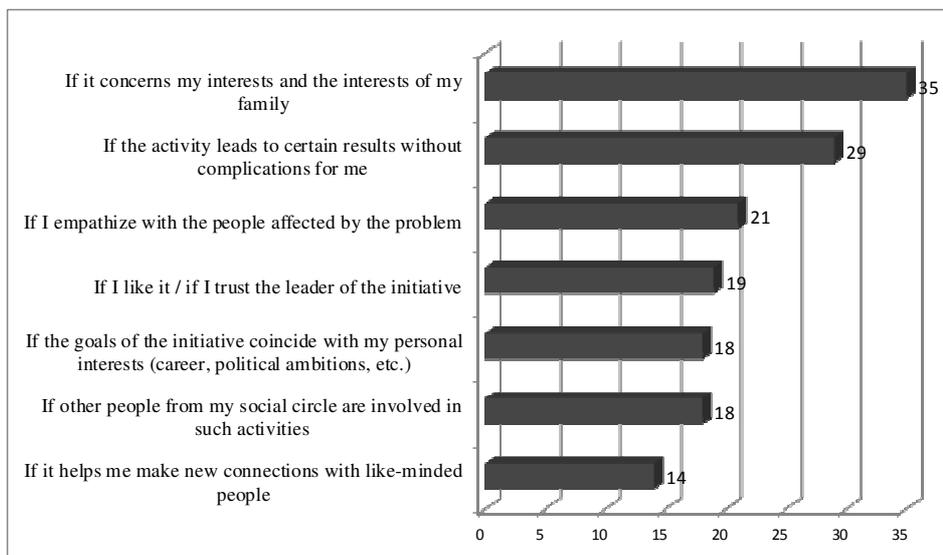
Respondents' answers to the question «Do you take part in the life of your community (house, street, district)?», %



Source: adapted from USAID (2020).

Figure 3

Incentives and motivations of the Ukrainian population's engagement with public organizations and CSOs, %



Source: adapted from USAID (2020).

Thus, a rather ambiguous picture is revealed. Achieving one's own goals and individual and family interests, striving to expand one's own social capital and assert oneself become the main factors and motives for civic engagement and public activity for the population of the country, public utility is not a priority. Such results require more detailed consideration and should be the subject of further research.

The results of the same nationwide survey on public engagement revealed internal barriers to public engagement of the Ukrainian population according to their self-assessments (USAID, 2020). According to the respondents, those are

- 1) low motivation to social activity, unwillingness to be involved in public activities (45%),
- 2) disenchantment with the effectiveness of social activity (33%),
- 3) belief that the state must solve problems (18%),
- 4) distrust of CSOs (15%),
- 5) did not find an initiative worth joining (13%),
- 6) no opportunities for public engagement (11%),
- 7) themselves need help because they belong to a vulnerable group (11%).

Thus, the analysis of the results of all-Ukrainian national surveys showed the deterioration of internal and external factors and preconditions for public engagement of the Ukrainian population in the activities of CSOs. Citizens' assessment of the effectiveness of civil society organizations, their attitudes, perceptions and their own public position largely determine the dynamics, opportunities and prospects of Ukrainian civil society, as well as its establishment and strengthening as an actor capable of influencing socio-political and socio-economic conditions in the country in stable and unstable times (e.g. systemic crisis).

Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Charitable Foundation (2019) conducted a nationwide survey of public opinion in Ukraine, which showed that after the spike in civic engagement in 2014-2016 there has been a downward trend approaching the levels preceding the Revolution of Dignity. For instance, only 7.5% of citizens said that they were involved in public activities – almost as many as in 2013 (8%); the membership in public organizations and associations did not increase either: in 2019, 90% of citizens did not belong to any organization, association or party, in 2013 – 85.5%. These contradictions indicate that civic engagement «awakens» only in times of acute socio-political changes, events and dangerous circumstances, then gradually fades under conditions of stabilization, without actually creating a powerful resource for self-development.

Additionally, the results of all-Ukrainian surveys revealed conflicting trends, which show that while the experience of public engagement is growing, the de-

sire to participate in the activities of CSOs is lessening. This may indicate a certain frustration on the part of the population with their own influence on society through participation in the activities of civil society organizations, the fragility of the effectiveness and influence of civil society as an actor. Significantly, the vast majority of citizens (77%) believe that the state should promote the development of civil society (only 9% disagree).

The situation with the pandemic has shown that the demand for civic self-involvement among the population has decreased. This is due to the impact of sanitary and epidemiological hazards, risks of loss of life and health. Passivity of citizens in the activities of CSOs during 2020 may also be caused by the low number of users of modern digital, ICT technologies, which make it possible to engage in constructive civic activity through Internet platforms and use certain services.

Activities of civil society organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the activities of civil society organizations in Ukraine. However, in contrast to the destructive impact on the economic sector, the impact of the pandemic was not so clear and showed mixed trends in the field of civic engagement.

The *CSO meter. Assessment of the civil society environment in the countries of Eastern Partnership. Updates in Ukraine* (Sydorenko & Latsyba, 2020) identifies the main positive and negative changes and trends in the operation of Ukrainian CSOs, including those formed in the context of the corona crisis. It is concluded that the improvements in legislation were largely isolated and could be grouped into three instances. First, provisions of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine «On the Rules of Procedure of the CMU» were adjusted in terms of detailing the procedure of consultations with interested parties. Second, positive practices of local governments, in particular the approval of statutes and instruments of public participation. Third, the fight against the corona crisis has temporarily changed some tax provisions for the better: customs duties and value added tax (VAT) on goods were abolished to combat COVID; the 4% limit for legal entities in the case of charitable assistance and restrictions on the application of tax rebates for individuals who provide assistance to CSOs were abolished to counter COVID as well.

The same publication also revealed negative trends in the legal support of CSOs due to certain limitations of their activities and opportunities caused by the pandemic, as well as other reasons (Sydorenko & Latsyba, 2020).

First, the number of registered bills has increased, which, if passed, will block or complicate the work of CSOs that participate in consultations when making government decisions, will limit the ability to receive funds from abroad, or will lead to additional discrimination against CSOs in the form of reports, restrictions on further work in state bodies, etc.

Second, introduction of anti-epidemic measures caused violation of the right to peaceful assembly (imposition of administrative sanctions for holding peaceful assemblies of more than 10 people), restricted freedom of speech (journalists were not allowed to enter the premises where meetings of authorities were held), equality of constitutional rights and freedoms (for example, permission to work for one legal entity with a simultaneous ban on work for others) (Detector Media, 2020).

Third, staff turnover in the upper management of authorities has had a negative impact on the development of Ukrainian civil society, as it hinders the building of lasting ties to improve existing legislation. For example, due to the transition of power in March 2020, the State Agency for Youth and Civil Society Development was dissolved (after lasting about two months), as it was established by a decision of the previous ministers.

Fourth, due to the redirection of funds to the Coronavirus Fund, the Cabinet of Ministers reduced the public funding of CSOs. For example, for public associations of persons with disabilities from 90 million (approximately 3 million euros) to 66 million hryvnias (approximately 2.2 million euro); for public associations of veterans from almost 18 million (600 thousand euros) to 9 million hryvnias (300 thousand euro).

Fifth, the new Law of Ukraine on Lease of State and Communal Property was put into effect, which in fact excluded the possibility of renting premises for CSOs on preferential terms, and introduced renting of premises by organizing an auction at market price (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020)¹. This will reduce the access of local CSOs to preferential communal and state premises for the organization's office.

Sixth, CSO support in cash and in kind from state and local budgets has always been underdeveloped, and the impact of the pandemic has further reduced these opportunities. Access to funding is very limited for CSOs. In most cases, CSO support from state and local budgets remains un-transparent, discriminatory and ineffective.

Existing tax incentives in the case of charitable assistance to individuals and legal entities are insufficient, the complicated procedure for access to them

¹ There are exceptions to the obligation to hold an auction for some types of organizations: (1) public organizations in the field of culture and arts (including national creative unions); (2) religious organizations that ensure the conduct of religious rites and ceremonies; (3) public organizations of veterans for creation of rehabilitation institutions for veterans.

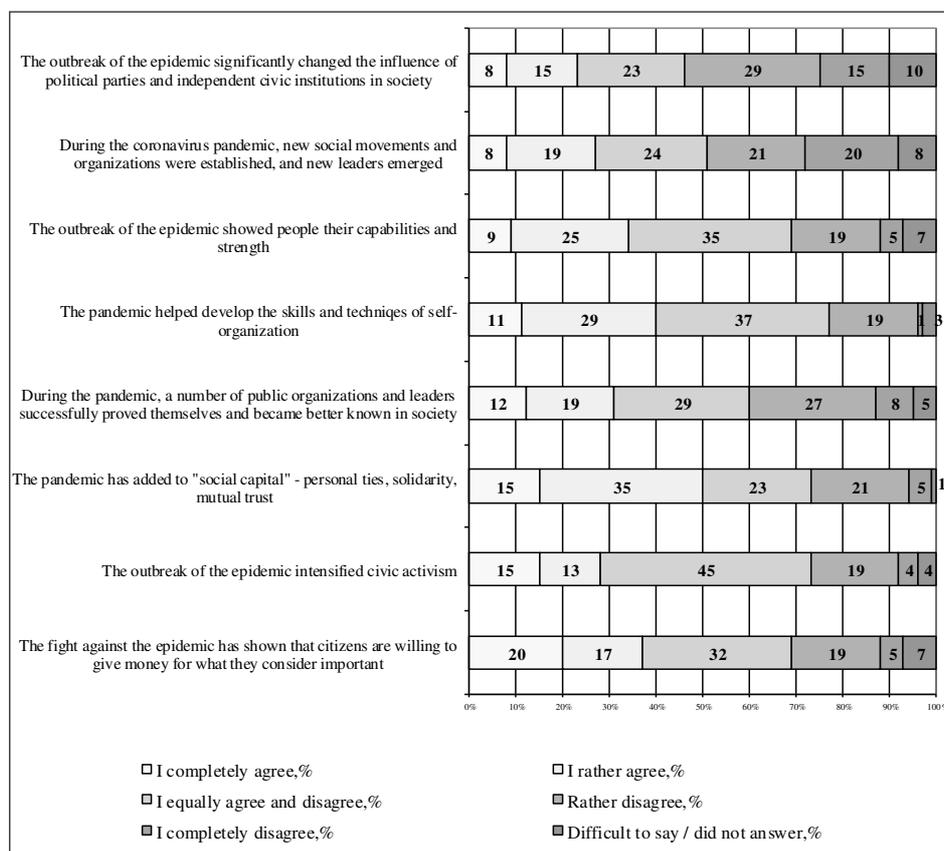
prevents their use. Thus, although the current legislation of Ukraine does not hinder the development of volunteering, it does not encourage such activities either. Personal income taxes on the volunteer's travel, food and accommodation expenses have not been abolished, if such expenses are covered by the CSO that engaged the volunteer. These are the main markers of legal support for the activities of Ukrainian CSOs in the context of the corona crisis.

The results of an expert survey conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Charitable Foundation (2020) among representatives of public organizations reveal the general idea of Ukrainian civil society.

The main results of the study are as follows. The level of development of civil society in Ukraine was assessed as average by 39% of experts (as high – 19%; as low – 17%). Further, 28% (15% + 13%) of respondents agreed with the statement «pandemic outbreak intensified public engagement», 23% (19% + 4%) disagreed, but almost half of respondents – 45% – had no conclusive opinion. The posit that the outbreak of the epidemic showed people their capabilities and strength, received almost the same number of agreements and undecideds – 34% (9% + 25%) and 35%, respectively, while the number of people who disagreed was significantly lower – 24% (19% + 5%). The statement that the pandemic has added to «social capital» – human ties, solidarity, mutual trust was deemed agreeable by 50% (15% + 35%) of respondents, disagreeable – 26% (21% + 5%), and neither true nor false – 23%. There were 40% (11% + 29%) who believed that the pandemic has intensified and helped to develop certain skills and techniques of self-organization, and almost as many – 38% – both agreed and disagreed with the statement, thus only 20% (19% + 1%) did not think so. 27% (8% + 19%) of experts agreed that new social movements, organizations and new leaders emerged during the coronavirus pandemic; significantly more respondents had the opposite opinion – 41% (21% + 20%). Finally, 23% of respondents (8% + 15%) believed that the influence of political parties and independent civic institutions in society has changed significantly; twice as many experts – 44% (29% + 15%) hold the opposite opinion (Fig. 4).

Experts' vision of the role of civil society organizations in counteracting the negative impact of the pandemic is fundamentally important in the context of the need to involve civil society resources for stabilization and reconstruction on the basis of sustainable and secure development (IKDICF, 2020). Experts consider the oversight over government activities and protection of socially vulnerable social groups to be the main priorities in the activities of public organizations in a pandemic. The attention of public associations should also be focused on providing people with legal and other assistance in defending their rights, conducting independent analytical research and proposing ways to solve socio-economic problems. At the same time, most respondents rated the role of civic activists in social change as high – 7 out of 10 maximum points. Experts also noted a certain change in the activities of public associations due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine – clarification of information on pandemic protection has become quite widespread.

Figure 4

**Experts' assessments of the impact of the pandemic on civic engagement
of Ukrainians and on the activities of CSOs, %**

Source: adapted from Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Charity Foundation (2020).

The two statements highlighted by the experts are fundamentally important in terms of developing updated institutional mechanisms for civil society participation in overcoming the negative impact of the pandemic on labour and employment. First, According to the majority of surveyed experts (70%), **partnership in joint activities** should be the basis for relations between civil society and the state during the crisis (only 20% believed that NGOs should focus on constructive criticism in this situation). Second, half of the experts see **new oppor-**

tunities for community development during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the main highlights being **cooperation using the latest technologies and remote formats**, assistance to vulnerable groups, counselling, and control over counterfeiting.

According to the results of the study, the main mechanisms of effective influence of CSOs on the government by the degree of influence were

- active interaction with the media – 69%,
- appeals to the world community and international organizations – 63%,
- implementation of good practices of interaction borrowed from other regions of Ukraine and other countries – 60%,
- development and promotion of analysis results on anti-pandemic stabilization policy and relevant recommendations for its implementation – 59%,
- establishment of strong unions (associations, movements), consolidation of CSO efforts to overcome the consequences of the pandemic – 59%,
- study and publication of public opinion surveys – 55%,
- monitoring of the deputies keeping their election promises and of adopted decisions – 51%,
- work in public councils and other advisory bodies at state institutions – 49%,
- delegation of representatives of public organizations to public positions (in the government, ministries, local governments, etc.) – 49%.

In developed democracies, traditional and key mechanisms for CSOs to influence government action include (a) public discussion (roundtables, public hearings) of pressing societal issues; (b) elaboration of own proposals for their solution, (c) appeals to judicial and higher authorities. Notably, they were not identified as a priority in the latest conditions – 47%, 43% and 41% respectively. In addition, mass protests are ranked rather low among the mechanisms of influence during the pandemic (organization of rallies, demonstrations – 25%).

The main problems and obstacles to the implementation of partnerships and effective interaction of CSOs with the authorities, according to experts – representatives of public institutions and CSOs – were reluctance of the authorities to cooperate, prejudice against civil society organizations – 73%, lack of transparency in the government and lack of information about its decisions – 55%, indifference, passivity of people to public life – 64%. Slightly less common were general disenchantment with the ability to protect human rights and interests; corruption in government – 47%, low level of confidence in non-governmental organizations in society – 36%, conflicts between non-governmental organizations – 32%, bias of non-governmental

organizations, inability to create a dialogue with the authorities, to compromise – 27% of experts' answers. Finally, influential negative factors also include underdevelopment and ineffectiveness of constructive interaction of public associations with public authorities, law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities and the prosecutor's offices; only nominal use of civil society organizations by public authorities and only at the stage of consultations; advocacy of a narrow range of issues, often limited to corporate interests (receipt of grant funds), rather than socially significant issues by civil society organizations; low level of available support (financial, organizational, personnel, information, scientific, methodological, technical and physical resources) of civil society organizations, etc. All of this shows the significant ambiguousness and uncertainty of the agency of Ukrainian civil society.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the pandemic has affected the activities of civil society in Ukraine and reduced their scope due to quarantine restrictions. The general state of affairs regarding the main problems and obstacles to the development and involvement of civil society resources has significantly deteriorated.

In fact, the changes that have taken place were caused by the interaction of the two contradictory trends mentioned above, where, on the one hand, the demand for consolidated and coordinated interaction of all actors, including CSOs, aimed at overcoming the negative consequences pandemic is growing sharply, and on the other hand, there is a significant restriction (and in some cases – impossibility and prohibition) on the direct social contacts in their traditional forms (precisely because of the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine restrictions). The urgent need to implement an effective anti-pandemic policy, policy of socio-economic stabilization and restoration on the basis of sustainable and safe development forces all parties to move to the use of remote, digital, information and communication technologies for safe social interaction, which have not yet become widespread in the country. Today, even though civil society organizations have a significant potential to participate in solving socio-economic problems, their involvement in ensuring sustainable and safe development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic remains low.

Institutional support for engaging the civil society potential in the digital transformations in recent conditions in Ukraine

Involvement of digitalization and modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in social and state life, in the system of interaction between government and citizens, employers' associations and trade unions creates a basis for effective counteraction to significant risks and dangers, promotes stabil-

ity of the domestic labour market, creates opportunities for recovery of the national economy, etc. Sufficiency of institutional support of digital transformations and introduction of new technologies to address issues of sustainable and safe socio-economic development are of great importance in terms of prospects for engaging the civil society potential. After all, the institutional environment, its state and the dynamics of development largely determine the likelihood of solving practical problems, in particular the issue of attracting the resources of civil society.

Thus, the results of the expert survey *Digital Transformations in Ukraine: Do Domestic Institutional Conditions Meet External Challenges and the European Agenda?* (Polissya Foundation for International and Regional Studies, 2020) show that the general assessment of Ukraine's digital development during 2019-2020 is mostly positive (67% of surveyed experts believe so). Experts noted several most important achievements in the field of digital development, namely the creation of a specialized Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, the establishment of the Digital Transformation Committee of Ukraine and its legislative activities, launch of public services portal and app «Diia» (translated as «Action»), increase in the number of available digital public services, development of digital communications, increasing number of initiatives in the field of digital education, and development of a strategy («road map») for Ukraine's integration into the Single Digital Market of the European Union.

At the same time, the most pressing problems of Ukraine's digital development at the moment include significant incompleteness of Internet coverage in Ukraine, the need to develop digital skills of all categories of citizens in all sectors of the economy, some delay in implementing the Law of Ukraine «On Digital Communications» (currently signed, but will enter into force on 01.01.2022), lack of officially approved strategic documents in the field of digital development, gaps in the system of cybersecurity and protection of personal data on the Internet, low quality of research in higher education and research institutions, and insufficient support for digital transformations in business. Nevertheless, today Ukraine conducts large-scale activities to create the conditions for sustainable and secure digital development, including in the field of e-democracy and online services to the population, retirees, entrepreneurs, the unemployed, and the employed alike, which has a positive impact on the development of civil society. Even before the corona crisis, Ukrainian authorities launched a large-scale project of digitalization of the state (implementation of the project «State in a smartphone», establishing a digital state) and created conditions for comprehensive digitalization of society. The government has begun to actively use e-government tools, to build a system of e-democracy – the interaction of government with society via the Internet.

According to the UN, today Ukraine is part of the group with a high EGDI index (e-government development index). In 2020, Ukraine was ranked 69th among 193 countries. This indicator shows a significant increase in Ukraine's rating in terms of e-government development compared to the previous year of the

study. In 2018, Ukraine was ranked 82nd in the overall ranking of countries according to the EGDI index (United Nations, 2020). In 2020, there was a significant increase in the Online Services Index (0.68 vs. 0.57 in 2018), as well as the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (0.59 vs. 0.44 in 2018). This result shows an increase in the number of available online services and the expansion of Internet access in the country. According to the 2020 survey, Ukraine has significantly increased the potential for the implementation of e-democracy elements and entered the group of countries with a very high level of the E-Participation Index, ranking 46th among 193 countries (in 2018 Ukraine was 75th) (Boyko, 2020).

The development and launch of the national online platform of e-democracy «Vzaiemodiiia» (2021) – as a digital space in which people can communicate freely with the executive branch and participate in decision-making (gradual introduction of the platform's services is scheduled for 2021-2022) – meets the demands and challenges of the time. The initiative to create this platform is extremely important and relevant and needs to be implemented as soon as possible. This has in some ways helped to respond quickly to the challenges and threats of the COVID-19 pandemic in the citizen-state system in order to save their lives and health.

Notably, 94 projects of digital transformation of key spheres of life of the Ukrainian state were presented within the framework of the Digital State project through the «Diia» online portal. The main projects of digital transformation are

- *E-ID* – electronic trust services
- *E-Demokratiia* – electronic democracy
- *E-Ekonomika* – digital economy
- *E-Hramotnist* – digitization of education
- *E-Dostup* – development of infrastructure for broadband Internet access and others (The World of Finance, Economics, Business and Technology, 2021).

It is important to note that the draft National Strategy for Civil Society Development for 2021-2026 (The World of Finance, Economics, Business and Technology, 2021) has a group of strategic objectives under the common name of «Ensuring effective procedures for public participation in the creation and implementation of public policy at national and regional level, addressing issues of local importance». Within the group, there is a task of developing and implementing an online platform for the interaction of executive authorities with citizens and civil society organizations, which will provide, among other things, access to mechanisms for electronic public consultations and public examination of the activities of executive bodies. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of creating such an information and communication platform for the development of CSO

interaction, both among themselves and with partners – government and business. Also noteworthy are the tasks envisioned for development that takes into account the advances in information and communication technologies and the principles of accessibility. They concern the legislative regulation of the procedure and methods of submitting appeals (including by legal entities) to state authorities, local self-government bodies, their officials; the obligation of state authorities and local self-government bodies to have an official website with standardized basic technical requirements for such a website, including basic public relations features². Implementation of these tasks will significantly increase the involvement of ICT in the interaction of CSOs with their partners.

Polissya Foundation for International and Regional Studies (2020) applied the method of content analysis to the official web page of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine in order to further the understanding of the development of the domestic digital market, as the Ministry has a leading role in the development and implementation of state-level infrastructure projects in the field of digitalization. The distribution of information on digital development showed that since its inception the Ministry of Digital Transformation has paid the greatest attention to such areas as «e-Government» (20% of publications), «Digital Skills» (18.7%) and «Innovation, ICT and startups» (10.4%). This is connected with the active promotion of the public services portal and the mobile application «Diia», the promotion of the online training platform «Action. Digital Education» and the promotion of the new initiative «Smart City». At the same time, considerably less attention was paid to such topics as «Open Data» (1.7%), «Cybersecurity» (2.4%), and «E-commerce and virtual assets» (3.6% of publications). The labour sector remained beyond the scope of The Ministry's of Digitization attention.

This distribution quite clearly reveals the real priority areas of development of the institutional environment for digital development in Ukraine. In the context of the prospects for involving civil society resources, such a distribution can be considered neutral – yes, the development of e-government and digital skills will certainly contribute to the development of civil society resources, but at the same time, targeted comprehensive action for transformation of civil society on the basis of digital technologies is absent. It is obvious (especially in the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic) that more attention needs to be paid to these issues, especially the development of strategic documents that would more clearly define the policy vectors and intentions of national authorities for further sustainable and secure digital development, that is, documents, whose lack is highlighted by experts as a significant shortcoming of the system of institutionalization of digital development of Ukraine (Polissya Foundation for International and Regional Studies, 2020).

² Although at the time of writing this National Strategy was still in draft status, it has already been discussed and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine at its meeting on June 16, 2021. It only needed to be signed by a Decree of the President of Ukraine.

The current Regulation (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2019) also stipulates that the Ministry of Finance interacts with citizen associations, public unions, trade unions and employers' organizations in the prescribed manner in the process of fulfilling its tasks. At the same time, the structure of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine as a separate structural unit provides for the creation and operation of an *expert group for the development of e-democracy, digitalization of civil society and personal data protection*. The Ministry also has a Public Council, which is an advisory body that helps citizens to participate in the management of public affairs, to oversee the activities of executive bodies, to encourage the government to consider the public opinion. Therefore, the interaction of public authorities and civil society creates a basis for further, broader favourable institutional conditions for CSO participation in the public administration system aimed at preventing and minimizing the risks and threats of the pandemic.

Thus, the analysis showed that today the basic organizational, managerial and legal starting conditions are actively developing in the form that will allow the wider involvement of Ukrainian civil society institutions in ensuring sustainable and secure digital development, stabilizing the socio-economic conditions in Ukraine, preventing and minimizing the risks and threats of the pandemic, ensuring digital, social, and economic security of the country and its citizens. However, the involvement and attention to the potential of CSOs, the use of their resources in addressing acute societal problems should be more focused in order to meet the European trends in this area.

Conclusions

Ukraine's European integration aspirations need to take into account and focus on European trends, on the best European experience in solving problems related to the operation of CSOs in the face of COVID-19 pandemic threats, as well as opportunities of engaging civil society resources in further post-pandemic socio-economic recovery in Ukraine. The analysis of European research on these issues has shown the high importance the EU attaches to the functioning and development of CSOs in the pandemic, the need to support their activities. Emphasis is placed on the need to utilize the potential of digitalization and ICT in order to maintain the resilience and ability of CSOs to fulfil their mission in society and expand opportunities for public engagement through the Internet resources like social networks, ICT, digital platforms, etc. This contributes to the formation of a digital civil society, establishment of its agency. The pan-European perception of CSOs as an influential actor in the system of social and socio-economic relations, especially in combating the threats of the corona crisis and further recovery, and the need to support them in these conditions should be taken into account by Ukraine in its integration initiatives and vector of development. The recommendations of European research for national and regional

governments are valuable: establish an alliance with the social economy and other civil society actors and provide them with the necessary legal framework and resources to expand their innovative solutions.

Summarizing the results of Ukrainian research on the operation of CSOs in the pandemic leads us to conclude that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of civil society organizations is ambiguous. Thus, on the one hand, the opportunities for traditional modes of activity related to direct social contacts, especially in the field of social services, mass events, etc. have been significantly limited. However, on the other hand, there has been an increase in the importance of «social capital» – human ties, solidarity, and mutual trust. Additionally, the pandemic has created conditions for easier acquisition of certain skills, technologies of self-organization, new forms of interaction with the categories of the population who need help; this positively affects the operation of civil society organizations in Ukraine. The demand for an active civil society increases considerably in the pandemic conditions, although the opportunities for its practical implementation narrow significantly. This problem needs to be understood and urgently addressed, especially in the context of the actual lack of positive dynamics in the development of Ukrainian civil society in terms of key indicators.

The analysis of qualitative parameters of the development of Ukrainian CSOs showed that sustainability and balance in the development of civil society have not been achieved in recent years; there is, however, certain predictability to manifestations of public activity. It spikes, as a rule, in the time of sharp socio-political changes and events and gradually fizzles out under conditions of stabilization without actually creating permanent and active public institutions. In addition, there is a negative trend of the declining desire to participate in the activities of CSOs despite the growing experience of public activity, especially evident during the corona crisis.

The need to preserve social contacts and social interaction was satisfied through a significant increase in their remote forms, based on the use of modern digital and information and communication technologies. They enabled continued, rather stable interaction of social actors in the unstable environment with rather rigid quarantine restrictions. At the same time, the process of utilizing the potential of ICT to ensure the operation of Ukrainian CSOs is quite chaotic; Ukrainian CSOs show a fairly low willingness to use ICT in their activities (which, incidentally, is quite typical for developed European countries).

In these conditions, there has been a surge in the urgency of digitally transforming the interaction between the drivers of socio-economic development (including civil society organizations), of transitioning to an updated format of this interaction based on digital technologies, one which would qualitatively change the environment and nature of such interaction, in particular, comply with health (quarantine) requirements and provide higher resistance to force majeure. Modern information and communication technologies allow for online interaction without restrictions, which provides protection against threats of infection and higher

resistance to influence of force majeure in the conditions of epidemiological dangers. In other words, reliance on digital technologies is one of the key and necessary conditions for preserving, developing and directing the potential of civil society to stabilize the socio-economic conditions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A significant and important step forward in the development of civil society in Ukraine and the engagement of its resources was taken with the adoption and implementation of the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021-2026 (the project was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on June 16, 2021). The purpose of the Strategy is to create favourable conditions for the development of public initiative and self-organization, establishment and operation of civil society organizations, forging of partnerships between them and public authorities and local governments, as well as improvement in the implementation of state policies aimed at promoting civil society development. However, the scale of the Project's incorporation of ICT potential for the development of CSOs is not sufficient; it should be borne in mind that in modern conditions, the widest introduction of digital technologies in the interaction of civil society organizations with other actors of socio-economic development is a necessary condition for their effectiveness. Therefore, considering that the Government plans to ensure the development and approval of two-year action plans for the implementation of the Strategy with the participation of civil society institutions after the Decree is signed by the President, there should be a significant increase in the attention to ICT potential in implementing the Strategy.

Further activities to ensure the development of Ukrainian civil society in the context of digitalization and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilizing its resources to stabilize the socio-economic conditions and help post-pandemic recovery should focus on improving the system of institutional and organizational mechanisms for using CSO social resources. This system should contain several key elements, namely: (1) *normative and legal support* for attraction of social resources of civil society organizations; (2) subsystem of *ensuring real participation* of civil society organizations in decision-making and implementation to conquer socio-economic risks and dangers and ensure sustainable and safe development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) subsystem for *ensuring fast information and communication interaction* between civil society organizations and other subjects of socio-economic development on the entire range of issues pertaining to joint activity; (4) *organizational, managerial and financial support* of socially useful activity of civil society organizations aimed at socio-economic stabilization, restoration and creation of protected secure space for different categories of the population in the conditions influenced by risks and threats of the pandemic.

In fact, these 4 elements form the key priorities for the development and capacity building of Ukrainian CSOs in the face of current challenges and threats. Maximum engagement of modern ICT, digital technologies, and Internet re-

sources is a necessary condition for the effective functioning of these structural subsystems; it will help stabilize the socio-economic conditions, transitioning into further recovery on the basis of sustainable and safe development.

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Received: August 30, 2021.
Reviewed: September 6, 2021.
Accepted: September 9, 2021.