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## **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

*The article outlines the ways of engaging young people in the development of civil society in Ukraine. Socially and politically active young people are one of the necessary conditions for forming a democratic society and establishing sustainable and functioning civil society institutions. Therefore, in this paper, the scholars aim to identify the ways of youth interaction with public authorities in Ukraine and general levels of youth civic engagement, as well as to characterize the culture of citizenship as a factor in involving young people in civil society development. The research reveals the relevant issue regarding the prominent role of civil society in various spheres of activity of state authorities and local self-government bodies, a qualitatively new level of interaction between civil society, especially youth as an active part of it, and state and local self-government bodies in order to establish effective dialogue and partnership relations of state bodies authorities, local self-government bodies with civil society organizations.*

*The research combined interdisciplinary approaches of several related scientific fields (political science, public administration and education), which allowed to set broader goals and find new ways for improving youth engagement in the development of civil society in Ukraine. The authors developed and conducted an expert survey on youth engagement in the development of civil society and identified possible ways to improve youth participation in public and political life. Authors interviewed 24 experts aged from 18 to 60 years from various fields who are interested in building a democratic state governed by the rule of law: leaders and members of public organizations, teachers of*

*higher education institutions, scholars, deputies of regional and local councils, civil society activists and businessmen.*

*It was determined that the effective participation of youth in decision-making processes consists in creating opportunities to involve youth in influencing, shaping, developing and promoting policy and development of services and programs. These opportunities are created by developing a range of formal and informal mechanisms for youth participation, from youth advisory groups to focus groups, from ongoing consultation work to supporting youth projects. As a result of the study, the authors developed a set of conclusions and recommendations addressed to educational institutions, public authorities, local governments and civil society organizations.*

**Key words:** *young people; civil society; civic engagement; citizenship education; public policy; youth; politics; democratic transition.*

**Statement of the problem in a general form.** Civil society institutions play an important part in modern democracies. Both the development and sustainability of democratic and civil society institutions require the formation in the young people's political consciousness of democratic values and beliefs about the need for a strong civil society, nurturing of political activity and initiative in public relations. During the last several years, the political participation of young people and youth NGOs (in particular, volunteer organizations) has intensified in Ukraine. The participation upheaval is caused by both external and internal threats to Ukraine's national sovereignty. Therefore, it becomes necessary to discuss the renewed role that civil society plays in various state and locally regulated processes. It is also important to analyze the qualitatively new level of interaction between civil society, especially youth as its active part, and civil society organizations, form one side and state and local authorities from other with the aim of establishing effective dialogue and partner relations.

The scholars highlight and analyze citizen participation in democratization process and civil society development in general [2; 9] and the role of youth in the democratization processes of Ukraine in particular [20; 7]. Kuzio discusses the factors that help understand the role

of youth in democratic revolutions as well as those essential conditions that lead to their success [13]. Tereshchenko explains the potential of young Ukrainians to engage in various forms of democratic participation [21]. Generally, as Foa and Ekiert state, “many postcommunist countries possess vigorous public spheres and active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks able to shape domestic policies” [5].

In recent years, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the functioning of civil society in the face of information society challenges. For example, the work edited by Hajnal highlights the role of skillful use of information and communication technologies as well as the media to strengthen the influence of civil society organizations [6]. A separate group of works on this issue consists of works by Ukrainian scholars about development of civil society in Ukraine [8; 11; 12]. Lizakowska draws attention to the need of improving the information and communication mechanism of interaction between public administration bodies and civil society institutions [14].

However, the majority of scholars focus primarily on the participation of youth and youth NGOs in the election campaigns or their cooperation with the leading political parties of Ukraine. Insufficient attention is devoted to youth participation in the socio-political life of the country as well as the formation and implementation of public policies in Ukraine in the framework of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. In such a way, the development of new approaches to state building by involving active youth in the development of civil society is not sufficiently researched.

This paper uses an interdisciplinary approach (political science, public administration, and education) with an aim to identify and improve the areas of youth engagement in the development of civil society in Ukraine. The explanatory research is done in order to achieve stated goal. Legal document analysis is used to identify priority areas of youth participation during the formation and implementation of public policies through the engagement in the decision-making process. The authors have developed and conducted an expert survey on youth engagement in the development of civil society to identify possible ways to improve youth participation in public and political life. We interviewed 24 ex-

perts aged from 18 to 60 years from various fields who are interested in building a democratic state governed by the rule of law: leaders and members of public organizations, teachers of higher education institutions, scholars, deputies of regional and local councils, civil society activists and businessmen. Experts live in different regions of Ukraine (Mykolaiv, Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson region etc.) and in different communities (village, big city). Based on this survey and on the observation method, we identified possible ways to improve youth participation in public and political life.

**Aim and Purpose of the Research.** The aim of this article is to identify the ways of youth interaction with public authorities in Ukraine and general levels of youth civic engagement, as well as to characterize the culture of citizenship as a factor in involving young people in civil society development.

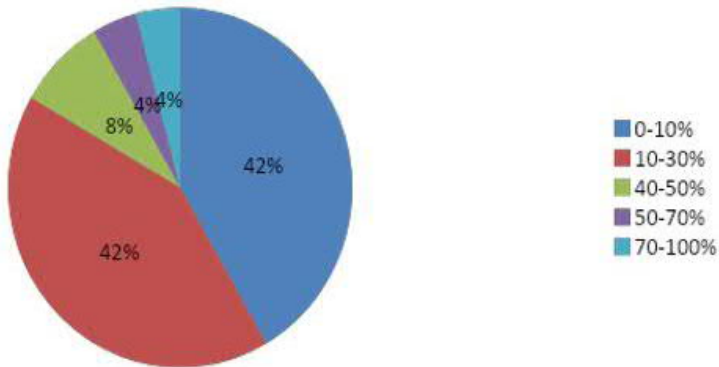
### **Results and Discussion.**

**Interaction of Youth as an Active Part of Civil Society with Public Authorities in Ukraine**

In a democratic state, the legislative, executive authorities, public associations, representatives of civil society, i.e. the public, play the leading role in the implementation of public policy. At the same time, young people play an important role as an active part of civil society. Accordingly, for the effective implementation of any public policy of Ukraine, it is necessary to involve citizens, especially active youth, in the process of its formation and implementation in order to gain support from those at whom public policy is directed.

It has been proven that in order to formulate public policy that works, policy makers cannot simply pass laws and issue orders. They must persuade people to follow these orders if they are to become part of a common practice [15]. Such approach helps emphasize the links between entities and people who develop and implement public policy. Political parties, interest groups, legislative procedures, presidential commitments, public opinion, and other aspects can be analyzed because they help to explain public policy-making by public authorities in democracies [1]. Therefore, it is necessary to engage more citizens, and especially youth, in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policy.

Our survey showed that since 2014 decentralization in Ukraine in the specified regions caused slight increase in the general level of interest and engagement of youth in the development of civil society. However, this indicator still remains low (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** How many young people (in percentage terms), in your opinion, take an active part in building the civil society of your region?

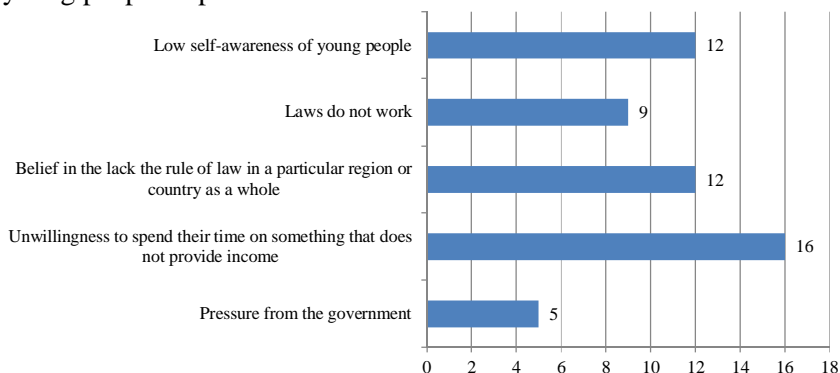
*Source: Authors*

Experts have defined young people as a group of people who act as a reliable partner in making decisions that have local significance, individuals who are able to contribute to solving problems and have strengths and talents. Given such positive assessment of youth by the experts, one needs to explain the generally low level of youth engagement in the country's socio-political processes. Thus, according to the experts, from 0% to 30% of young people in different regions of the country take active part in the development of civil society (see Fig. 1).

The leading reasons for the lack of activity of young people in building civil society, according to the experts, are shown in the Figure (see Fig. 2).

The interviewed experts highlight the following main problems regarding the opportunities for involving young people in the development of civil society in Ukraine: imperfect legislation, legal regulation and its declarative nature, the distrust of power, certain political apathy, in some cases – indifference and distrust of the government and of the deci-

sion-making process; insufficient willingness of the authorities to involve young people in political life.



**Fig. 2.** What are the main reasons, in your opinion, that explain the lack of activity of young people in building civil society (select up to three options)?

*Source: Authors*

At the same time, according to our expert survey, the main areas of interest of young people in socio-political affairs are participation in executive and managerial activities and informative messages about activities of local government.

According to the expert interview results, the lowest percentage of youth engagement is in the sphere of government interaction with youth, consultations, engagement of youth in the committees. Moreover, there are almost no youth camps and low cooperation and engagement of young people in the formation of certain areas of youth programs. However, more than half of the experts point out the government cooperation with youth volunteer organizations and the existence of youth councils and parliaments. They form the basis for the community interaction mechanisms between various level of officials and young people.

Taking into consideration the mentioned above issues, experts stress the importance of forming and developing the following ways to engage more young people in building civil society: prompt and motivate more secondary and higher educational institutions to participate in community initiatives, civic projects with children and youth; at the local government level to enable young people to create hubs, clubs and interest

groups, through which they can unite in groups, form group identity; engage young people in decision-making and implementation of decisions and make it a state priority and possible a responsibility; develop and implement various education and self-education programs for young people; involve youth organizations in grant writing and grant implementation, create efficient youth NGOs.

Involving young people in the management of public affairs is an important component of the formation of civil society. Accordingly, we describe the forms of youth participation in the formation and implementation of public policies through engagement in the decision-making process:

1. Participation in the advisory bodies. These bodies may include youth councils, boards, educational committees, youth parliaments and so on.

2. Participation in the activities of youth centers as centers for the formation of active citizenship and non-formal education. Initiation, creation and development of youth non-governmental organizations, volunteer organizations, youth camps, informal youth educational organizations, etc.

3. Encouraging young people to work for public authorities and for united territorial communities.

4. Participation in political life through membership and political activity in political parties, as well as the realization of their own right to elect and be elected to public authorities and local governments.

5. Participation of youth in the activities of student-government bodies at educational institutions.

6. Participation of Ukrainian youth in international programs, in particular in European ones.

7. The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU holds a separate chapter on cooperation in the youth sphere. Ukraine also implements several measures in order to develop and deepen cooperation in the sphere of youth policy within the Council of Europe. Special attention in the field of international cooperation should be paid to cooperation with the Ukrainian diaspora. Various international youth exchanges are also a separate youth development tool in this area.

8. Youth participation in the formation of youth policy.

Such participation can be done through the following tools: providing opportunities for young professionals to participate in various reform

teams and projects; participation in the formation of certain areas of youth programs and the agenda of youth activities; use of financial incentives and various motivation approaches for active young people, etc. The organization of internships for young people in government institutions such as the Parliament, the Office of the President of Ukraine, ministries, local state administrations, city and village councils, etc. is another effective tool. It could be used to promote the engagement of young people in the civil service and local government. Young people also have opportunities to study international practices that could be potentially implemented in Ukraine in future with the help of various programs.

Various forms of motivation and incentives can be used to support youth, its initiatives and its engagement in the processes of state building and civil society development. Examples of incentives include project competitions (funded from the state budget), Presidential awards, and awards from the government, parliament or local government that are given to young people for high achievements, civic engagement and initiative, as well as government grants for gifted youth.

Several frameworks describe the interaction of youth with the public authorities and local government entities. In our opinion, «The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process» (recommended by the Council of Europe's Forum for the Future of Democracy and drafted by the Conference of INGOs) provides a comprehensive model for interaction of youth with public authorities and local government [10]. This model entails four levels depending on the degree of participation: 1) information – one-way provision of information from public authorities; 2) consultation – usually initiated by public authorities and designed to hear the opinion from the NGOs on a specific policy topic or development; 3) dialogue – ensures more complete and deeper communication between the subjects (public authorities and NGOs) through discussions, meetings, hearings, etc.; 4) partnership – aimed at providing the opportunity to delegate specific tasks and responsibilities to individual entities and to cooperate as partners.

It is worth noting that the attainment of each subsequent level is possible only with sufficient development of the previous one. Each of these levels can be implemented with different tools and various channels. In particular, information can be provided through official channels, as well



as using social networks, e-mails, online announcement of information campaigns in the media, etc. The level of consultations can include electronic and offline consultations with young people at the local level, consultations during various forums, conferences, round tables held at the regional levels, as well as petitions at the national level and sociological surveys of youth, focus groups, etc. The third level, the dialogue, can be realized through open hearings, public discussions, debates, public discussions; creation of youth groups, committees and associations, activities of multilateral advisory bodies; organization of trainings, seminars and discussion forums, as well as using the tool of public online inquiries and written proposals and recommendations. Finally, the partnership level is implemented through the development of draft decisions in cooperation with youth, participation of youth in various bodies and commissions, development of youth strategies and action plans, youth initiation of projects and support from the authorities of their implementation.

Young people are a part of society that is quite willing to accept new proposals and innovations, has new necessary communication tools. That is why today there are no serious obstacles to improve the quality of youth interaction with public authorities and local government at all four levels.

One of the tools to ensure the principles of openness and transparency in public administration is the media. In addition, it is an important institution for the formation and implementation of public policy. At present, the Internet allows people to communicate and to interact with each other in various ways that create new sources of accountability of power in a society. We can say that this phenomenon illustrates the emergence of a new «fifth power» in the state. According to Dutton, unlike the “fourth power” of the press and the media, the traditional media, the «fifth power», which is being created through the Internet, can almost momentarily reach opinion leaders and political activists [3]. This provides new opportunities and tools to hold politicians and key policy institutions accountable.

The role of the Internet and social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, etc.) manifested itself and significantly increased during Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity in late 2013 – early 2014 in Ukraine, as well as the 2019 presidential election. Proactive stance of

young citizens caused by these events in Ukraine was aired on social networks and promoted exchange of views and information. It also led to faster dissemination of relevant and diverse information, as well as a significant and rapid further mobilization of civil society, especially active youth. Thus, the most active users of the Internet and social networks in Ukraine are young people. The Internet is also the largest source of information, a platform for expression of opinion, criticism, and a place to form social and political interests' groups.

Non-governmental organizations should be one of the driving forces for the development of youth engagement in society. NGOs should conduct both theoretical and practical trainings, round tables, conferences, discussion and debate clubs, etc. Organizing ongoing activities is crucial for motivating and supporting youth over a long period. They may also be used to provide certain social services for the members of the community.

The development of a legal framework that would cover the activities of politically oriented youth parties is necessary for the promotion of youth participation. Legislative initiatives in this sphere should include definition of youth political organizations and their sources of funding (funding can be provided from the Fund for financing political parties or youth NGOs) [12].

Political youth organizations should also be recognized as wings of political parties, and be registered accordingly and / or as separate non-governmental organizations. In addition, the legal framework may foresee a quota for young people in the party electoral lists and the establishment of a youth advisory body for political parties, which will submit bills related to the youth sphere to the party.

An important step towards the increase of youth participation is the official recognition by state of youth work and “youth worker” as a profession, as well as recognition of the hours volunteered. Youth work is a tool for personal development, social integration and active participation of young people in civil society. It combines all kinds of social, cultural, educational or political activities carried out together with young people and by young people themselves [11].

The main goal of youth work in this process is to create opportunities for young people so that they can shape their own future. At the same

time, the process of developing youth work in Ukraine and its recognition should not focus on the development or adoption of only one form of youth work. This is conditioned by the fact that youth work in Ukraine is often implemented in public youth organizations, youth centers, charities, foundations, social services and educational institutions. Non-governmental, non-profit and volunteer organizations which are involved in the implementation of youth projects should participate in the process of development and implementation of youth work. The financial foundations for the organization and development of such kind of work should be provided by the state.

Volunteering is no less important for the development of young people and youth participation than other forms of engagement. Volunteering increases opportunities for self-realization of young people, supports non-governmental organizations, helps to share the experience and build relationships in the society.

Thus, we described the forms of youth participation during the formation and implementation of public policies through the engagement in the decision-making process. In addition, based on our developed and conducted expert survey on youth engagement in civil society development, we identified possible ways to improve youth participation in public and political life.

#### Citizenship Culture as a Factor of Youth Engagement in the Development of Civil Society

Any democratic changes in any modern country are impossible without the formation of a civil society. It is clear that in addition to building necessary civil society institutions and it is necessary to form the public consciousness, to develop the need to create an appropriate social order, to promote responsibility of citizens for their country and readiness to take an active part in building civil society.

Analyzing various aspects of youth citizenship, we observe that the same position and action can be achieved in different ways. Some of these ways may not be in accordance with the laws or values, which is why there is a need to discuss the citizenship culture of Ukrainian youth. In our opinion, an ideal algorithm for forming the citizenship culture of Ukrainian youth should contain the following components.

Firstly, a social participant (i.e. civil society participant) at the theoretical and conceptual level should identify and later at the level of

involvement in civic activity should combine the following parts: political behavior, political action, political participation and political activity.

Secondly, with the help of civic education the person should form a conscious need for self-actualization through politics.

Thirdly, it is necessary to create conditions for the realization of real social and political influence of individual and collective civil society participants on the state, including the usage of the Internet social networks. Such effect should comply with the principles of universality, consistency, dynamism and unity of psychological and social components (i.e. awareness of a need on a personal level and understanding the need of its implementation at the level of socially important actions and also duality – dissemination of political and social influence as an element of the political process in space and time) [9, p. 11].

The result of the formation of a citizenship culture should be “person as an agent of interdependence and mediation of interaction between civil society and government” [8, p.131].

Thus, political education is part of civic education. That is why the study of political science should be introduced into the educational process starting at the secondary school level. The need for widespread introduction of political education among young people is conditioned by the low level of their participation in electoral processes and the low level of political activity in general. At the same time, political education can be implemented within the framework of non-formal education development and with the involvement of youth non-governmental organizations in this process, in particular in youth political organizations/wings of political parties. However, such educational programs must not support any of the political parties or ideologies, but only to give general knowledge about the political process and different ideologies.

Thus, in order to rationally use resources to address the problem of civic education of young people, it is necessary to focus on the following priority areas:

Priority 1. Citizenship and patriotism – the implementation of measures aimed at establishing patriotism, civic consciousness and active citizenship of young people in the following areas:

– Direction: “National-patriotic education”. Objective: formation of patriotic consciousness of youth, promotion of Ukrainian folk

traditions, awareness of national identity, involvement of youth in socially significant activities, creation of centers of national-patriotic education.

– Direction: “Dignity and Tolerance”. Objective: education of young people’s sense of personal and national dignity, overcoming inferiority complexes, formation of a respectful attitude to the beliefs, culture, traditions of others.

– Direction: “Youth in harmony with the law”. Objective: prevention of crimes and negative actions of young people, enhancement of the legal knowledge, legal culture and legal behavior of young people.

– Direction: “Environmental protection”. Objective: to form the attitude of care of young people toward natural, social and cultural environment.

Priority 2. “Healthy and safe lifestyle” – measures aimed at promoting healthy and safe youth lifestyles through the following areas:

– Direction: “Healthy mind is in a healthy body”. Objective: to create conditions for improving physical and mental health of young people by implementing the system of physical activities and sport, healthy and safe lifestyle, promotion of sports camps for youth.

– Direction: “In harmony with oneself and the world”. Objective: to promote mental health of young people, promote knowledge and develop skills about safe environment and activities.

Priority 3. Development of non-formal education – to form a holistic system of youth non-formal education and to create conditions for the development and self-realization of each person in partnership with the non-governmental associations, state authorities and local governments. The essence of non-formal education is the acquisition of knowledge and skills by young people through participation in socially significant activities. The leading directions of this priority are defined as follows:

– Direction: “Youth Worker”. Objective: formation of the training system for young people to prepare them for employment in state authorities and local self-government.

– Direction: “Youth Centers”. Objective: to create centers for the formation and implementation of youth policy.

– Direction: “Support of creative initiatives of young people”. Objective: to create conditions for the development of creative activities,

support various youth initiatives, support and promote creative inclusive youth groups; promote the development of professional and amateur artistic creativity, the development of a modern leisure industry for young people.

– Direction: “Information and training portals for youth”. Objective: information support of youth policy and youth communications.

– Direction: “Support of civil society institutions”. Objective: strengthening the youth movement, provision of financial support for socially significant projects and programs of civil society.

Priority 4. Employment and development of youth entrepreneurship – creation of conditions and implementation of measures aimed at ensuring employment and development of youth entrepreneurship. Areas of implementation:

– Direction: “Career guidance”. The goal is to direct and mentor the professional interests of young people.

– Direction: “Youth Entrepreneurship”. Objective: to promote the development of youth entrepreneurship, self-employment and effective promotion of young people in the business environment.

– Direction: “Volunteering”. Objective: to involve young people in socially significant activities, non-formal education and secondary employment.

Priority 5. “International cooperation” – implementation of measures aimed at the integration of youth into the world and European youth community [17].

Thus, civic self-determination of young people is the cornerstone for their civic engagement. It is one of the forms of self-development as it involves comprehension of one’s own values, gives a person an opportunity to understand not only one’s own personal world, but also the world around, to form critical thinking skills. Civic self-determination forms a person with an active civic position, who does not stand aside from the socio-political processes that may affect one’s life.

**Conclusion.** The article presents the ways of engaging young people in the development of civil society in Ukraine including outlining of the problems and their possible solutions.

1. Thus, the leading mechanisms for involving young people in the development of civil society are the following: civic education; formation

of motivation to be involved in the development of civil society; interaction of youth with public authorities; intensification of educational activities in the youth environment devoted to state building and public administration; improving the system of selection and admissions of talented young people to higher educational institutions that train specialists for service in the state authorities and local governments; increase the number of internship opportunities for young people in government and local government; increase the representation of young people in the service of public authorities; increase of the professional level of young civil servants and officials, creation and development of non-governmental organizations that will cover various spheres of society; development of the “youth worker” profession; development of volunteering and effective trainings.

2. Civic self-determination and civic engagement are important indicators of a developed society, the purpose and direction of which is development.

3. The effective participation of young people in the decision-making processes entails creating opportunities to involve young people in influencing, shaping, developing and promoting policies and developing services and programs. These opportunities are created by developing a number of formal and informal mechanisms for youth participation, from youth advisory groups to focus groups, from ongoing counseling to support of youth projects.

4. There are many reasons for involving young people in the decision-making process, including promoting better decision-making and improving the effectiveness of management decisions, strengthening community capacity, positive youth development, and building relationships between government and youth.

**Стаття надійшла до редакції: 08.01.2024**

## ЗАЛУЧЕННЯ МОЛОДІ ДО РОЗВИТКУ ГРОМАДЯНСЬКОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА В УКРАЇНІ: ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА ШЛЯХИ ВИРІШЕННЯ

У статті окреслено шляхи залучення молоді до розвитку громадянського суспільства в Україні. Соціально та політично активна молодь є однією з необхідних умов формування демократичного суспільства та становлення стійких та функціонуючих інститутів громадянського суспільства. Тому в даній роботі науковці ставлять за мету визначити шляхи взаємодії молоді з органами державної влади в Україні та загальні рівні громадянської активності молоді, а також охарактеризувати культуру громадянськості як чинник залучення молоді до розвитку громадянського суспільства. Дослідження поєднало міждисциплінарні підходи кількох суміжних наукових галузей (політології, державного управління та освіти), що дозволило поставити ширші цілі та знайти нові шляхи для покращення залучення молоді до розвитку громадянського суспільства в Україні. Автори розробили та провели експертне опитування щодо залучення молоді до розвитку громадянського суспільства та визначили можливі шляхи покращення участі молоді у громадсько-політичному житті. За результатами дослідження авторами розроблено низку висновків та рекомендацій, адресованих навчальним закладам, органам державної влади, місцевого самоврядування та організаціям громадянського суспільства.

**Ключові слова:** молодь; громадянське суспільство; громадянська активність; виховання громадянськості; Державна політика; політика; демократичний перехід.

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