



## **Citizen Engagement in Parliamentary Democratic Practices during Wartime: Ukraine's Experience**

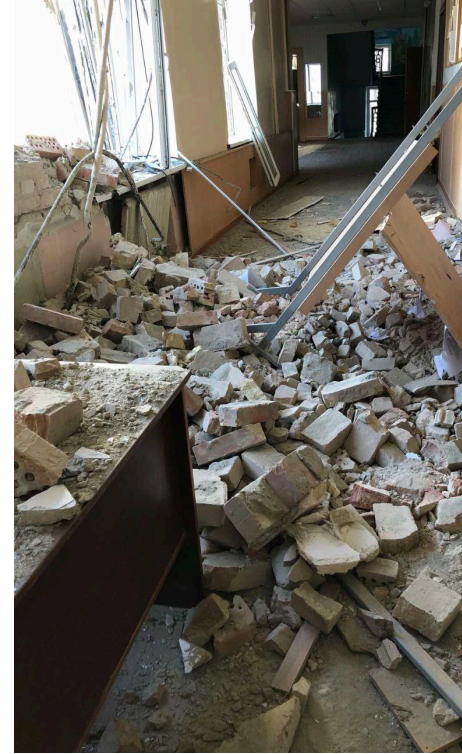
Parliaments have a vital role as democratic institutions in addressing society's challenges. Engaging citizens, including youngsters, in decision-making is essential to building public trust, increasing the legitimacy of decisions, and achieving participatory, inclusive, and responsive governance.

An engaged, well-educated citizen is at the heart of strong democratic societies. Civic education is needed for younger generations to build civic competencies, which will ensure their growth as responsible citizens. Creating an environment in which youth feel their voice counts is crucial.

It is especially important today when Ukrainians are fighting for an independent democratic future. What's more, war brings incredible challenges for parliamentary work, civil society, and democracy. Russia systematically deports Ukrainian children from the occupied territories, destroys educational infrastructure, forces Ukrainian students to study in shelters, etc., and Ukrainian civilians, including children, often are victims of Russian missile attacks.







*Irpin specialized school No. 2 after Russia's missile attacks*

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The war must not put parliamentary education on hold as we can't afford to lose our next generation. The war motivates us to work even harder to educate conscious citizens who will participate in political life, take responsibility for their decisions, and work to make our country a better place

**Svitlana Merkulova,**  
*teacher at specialized school No. 2  
in Irpin, Kyiv oblast*

However, even in the face of a brutal, unprovoked Russian war, Ukrainians continue to develop their democracy. Here are just a few examples of institutions and activities that, with USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program’s support, increase the engagement of citizens and youth in the policy and decision-making processes in Ukraine.

## Education Center of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

The Parliamentary Education Center (PEC) conducts various lessons and interactive events in order to:

- raise public awareness of VRU's activity, functions, and role in the system of state bodies;
- thus, promote Parliament's openness, intensify interaction with citizens, and strengthen public trust.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion, the PEC has been adapting its work to wartime conditions. Its staff:

- established an unprecedented mixed (online and offline; for citizens in Ukraine and abroad) work mode;
- ensured continuous communication with citizens and education without borders;
- introduced field lessons in Ukraine's regions;
- developed international partnerships and diplomacy.

As a result, the number of events and participants dramatically increased. During the two years of the full-scale invasion, the PEC organized more than 300 events, with over 150,000 participants. The main audience is pupils and students, including children with disabilities.





*Employees of the VRU Education Center conduct a parliamentary lesson in a shelter during an air raid alarm*



*The VRU Education Center conducts parliamentary lessons for primary school students from newly liberated territories of Kyiv oblast*





*The VRU leadership meets with young people in wartime*



*Field lessons of the VRU Education Center at universities in different Ukraine's regions*

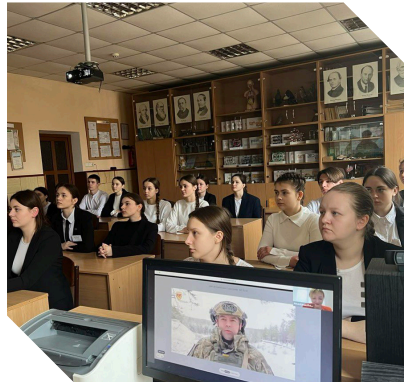




*Field lessons of the VRU Education Center at universities in different Ukraine's regions*



## Ukraine's Experience



*Ukrainian students from schools, their homes and shelters take part in an online lesson marking the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (31,000 people registered for the lesson)*





## Parliamentary Internships for the youth

*Leadership of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and participants of the latest Parliamentary Internship Program, 2021*

The Parliamentary Internship Program for Ukraine was founded in 1995. Since that time, over 2100 graduates in 27 cohorts have successfully completed the Program. The Program serves as a professional elevator for youth: among its alumni are 9 MPs from different convocations, as well as ministers, heads of state bodies, diplomats, etc. About 7% of alumni serve as the staffers of the Secretariat of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. During martial law, the Program's activities are suspended.



It's high time the youth got actively involved in government policy and state bodies. Our shoulders will bear the burden of the war and post-war reconstruction. The critical mass of conscious people has increased significantly, and I do believe we can build a better Ukraine

**Liliia Tertyshna,**  
*participant of the youth  
internship program*

*The Parliamentary Research Service staff and participants of the youth internship program during the opening ceremony*

However, in 2023, the USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program organized a youth internship at the Research Service of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to strengthen its institutional and expert capacity, create opportunities for young people to bring their voices to government bodies, and help them influence policy-making.





*Interns share their impressions of the youth internship program at the final session*



## Network of parliamentary civic education centers

Schools remain the main place of education for Ukrainian children in wartime. When democracy is under attack, it is crucial to create a space where children can form their civic competencies for future public engagement in decision-making and influencing state policy.

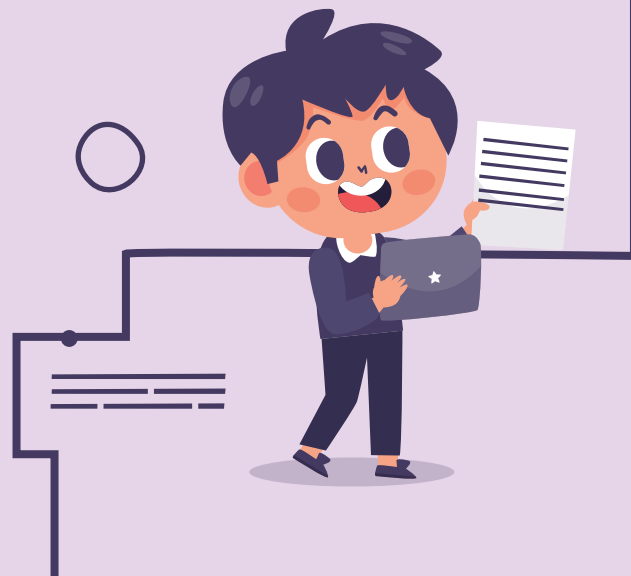
To promote parliamentary civic education, a network of parliamentary civic education centers has been established in 43 schools and out-of-school education institutions in 14 Ukrainian regions with the support of USAID "RADA: Next Generation" Program and partner Agency for Educational Policy Development. An educational program and methodological recommendations for the course "Our Parliament: Explore, Understand, Influence" are already being tested in the network of parliamentary civic education centers.

An all-Ukrainian simulation game, "Y18: We are lawmakers!" was also launched for high school students. During the game, the students imitate the work of the VRU Committees and elaborate draft laws to solve social problems. In such a way, Ukrainian youth can learn in practice how the parliament works as well as its role in state policy formation.

 online meeting

### Dialogue between pupils and MPs within the simulation game "Y18: We are Lawmakers!"

MP Roman Hryshchuk answered pupils' questions





*Teachers of the Parliamentary Education Network conduct interactive lessons for pupils to introduce Parliament's work and principles*



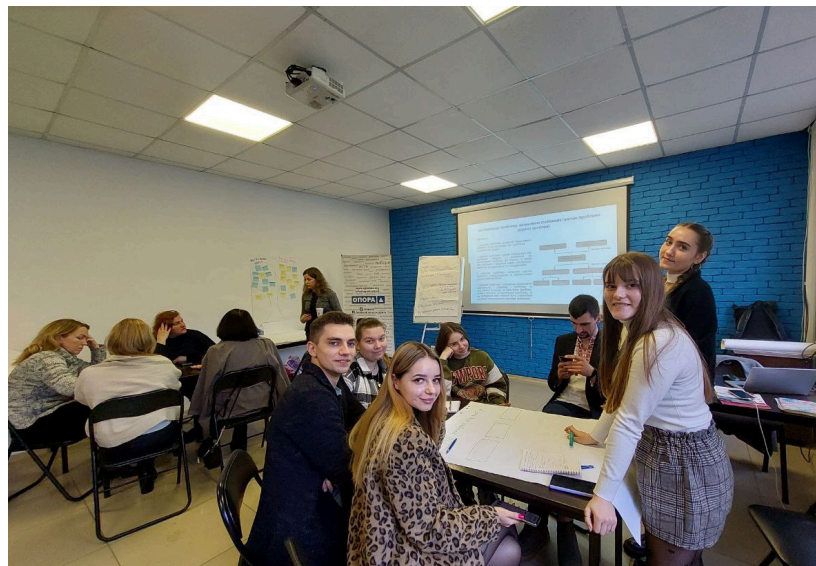
## Civil Society Engagement

To respond to wartime challenges and needs, USAID "RADA Next Generation" Program launched the "Citizens and Parliament: Democratic Representation and Effective Interaction in the Wartime" Grant Initiative for civil society organizations (CSOs).

Within this Grant Initiative, CSOs:

1. held public consultations on important public issues and legislation, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and MPs;
2. trained civic activists to interact with the authorities and MPs of Ukraine;
3. studied the needs of voters under martial law and presented the results to lawmakers;
4. worked with voters to engage them in decision-making and develop legislative proposals;
5. communicated reforms and legislative changes in the context of war and Ukraine's European integration.

*Rivne Regional Organization of NGO "OPORA Civil Network", a grantee of the USAID "RADA: Next Generation" Program, trains local activists on how to interact with parliamentary representatives and organize public consultations*



*NGO “Institute Respublica,” a grantee of the USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program, organizes training clubs to increase public awareness of parliamentary democracy and facilitates public consultation between MPs and voters on Ukraine’s recovery and development plan in War and post-war period*



## Ukraine's Experience

*NGO “Dobra Hromada,” a grantee of the USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program, facilitates meetings between MP Halyna Vasylichenko and local stakeholders to discuss potential legislative changes on local taxes*



*NGO “Union for Promotion of Rural Green Tourism Development in Ukraine,” a grantee of the USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program, facilitates meetings between MP Larysa Bilozir and local stakeholders to discuss voter issues and needs in rural areas in wartime*





## About the Program

USAID “RADA: Next Generation” Program is a five-year initiative (2021-2026) implemented by Internews-Ukraine and financed by United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Program's main goal is to advance "next generation" reforms that will enable the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU) to be a modern, effective, and accountable institution for Ukraine's democratic development.

Program's Objectives:

1. increase constituent participation in the legislative process, particularly with improved and systematic interaction between MPs and voters;
2. strengthen the Verkhovna Rada's analytical and oversight capacities and ensure an end-to-end legislative process;
3. introduce innovative digital and communication solutions into Verkhovna Rada's work.

*Program implementation is made possible by the generous support of the American people through USAID. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*

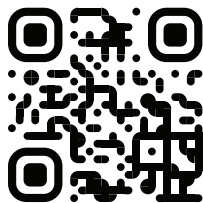


## Contacts of the Program:

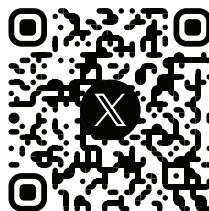


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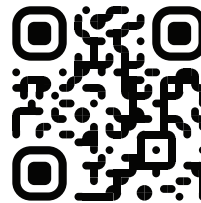
## See also:



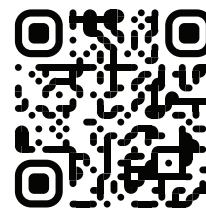
*Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*



*VRU Education Center*



*Ministry of Education and  
Science in Ukraine*



*Save schools in Ukraine*

