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FOR EASTERN UKRAINE

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Civic Engagement:

What women and men say they do,
and what they actually do

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About UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine

USE is an analytical tool implemented on an annual basis and designed to improve the understanding of societal dynamics in eastern Ukraine. This helps to identify strategic entry points for policies and programs that contribute to strengthening social cohesion.

USE is based on the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index methodology, which was originally developed in Cyprus by the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development and UNDP. For more information on USE methodology and to see the results of the first (2017) and second (2018) waves visit use.scoreforpeace.org

The findings in this paper are based on the results of the 2018 UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine (USE). The data captures the views of 6,000 residents of the five oblasts in the east of Ukraine (government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and neighboring Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts).

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Introduction

How far would you be willing to go to change things for the better in your society? Would you be ready to use political and social means? Would you even be willing to resort to violence? Or would you prefer to stay focused on your private life and personal business? This report is the third in a series of reports analyzing social cohesion in eastern Ukraine from a gender perspective. It explores what actions women and men in eastern Ukraine say they would be prepared to take to bring about change in their localities, and the extent to which they actually engage in civic activities. It also unpacks what types of civic activities women and men engage in, and what the incentives are for their engagement. This provides a better understanding of the link between intent and action, which can be used to inform targeted policies and programs aimed at promoting women's and men's civic engagement.

Summary of findings

- Both men and women in eastern Ukraine demonstrate somewhat low levels of intentions and actual civic participation. The main reason for this is a high level of pessimism about the opportunities for change in their communities.
- Ironically, while men are somewhat more likely than women to declare their intention to take action outside of their private sphere, the actual level of civic participation is higher among women. Men, however, demonstrate a higher readiness to turn to violence in order to bring about political or social change.

To be or not to be active

Intentions to contribute to social change

In terms of measuring the intention of people to engage in activities aimed at bringing about societal change¹, broadly speaking, people fall into one of three categories: 1) those who prefer to be active within certain limitations, 2) those who prefer to mind their personal business only², and 3) those who prefer to be active without limitations, including through violent means.

In eastern Ukraine, both men and women say they are more inclined to mind their own business (i.e., to be socially passive³) than to take an active action to improve their communities⁴ (See Figure 1). Men are somewhat more likely than women to declare their intention to take an active action outside of the private sphere; this holds true both in terms of non-violent engagement (44 percent and 38 percent, respectively) and violent engagement (7 percent and 2 percent, respectively).

¹ Respondents were asked what they would be willing to do to change the current conditions in their community and in society more generally.

² Focusing on one's private life and personal business is not a negative notion in itself. For the purpose of unpacking civic engagement in the context of social cohesion, however, an intention to only focus on one's own affairs is contrasted with the more active stance that people may take – i.e., being active as citizens and members of local communities. Hence, the contrast is made between the so-called "passive" and "active" civic intentions.

³ In the context of USE, personal business do not refer to intentions to work at home/from home or be an entrepreneur, but a preference for minding one's business instead of considering being involved in activities affecting the wider community or society.

⁴ Here and elsewhere in the document the results reflect findings in eastern Ukraine. These results may not be unique to the east of the country, though. In fact, there are similar results across many of the social cohesion indicators in other oblasts in Ukraine (see the nation-wide Ukraine [Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index](#)).

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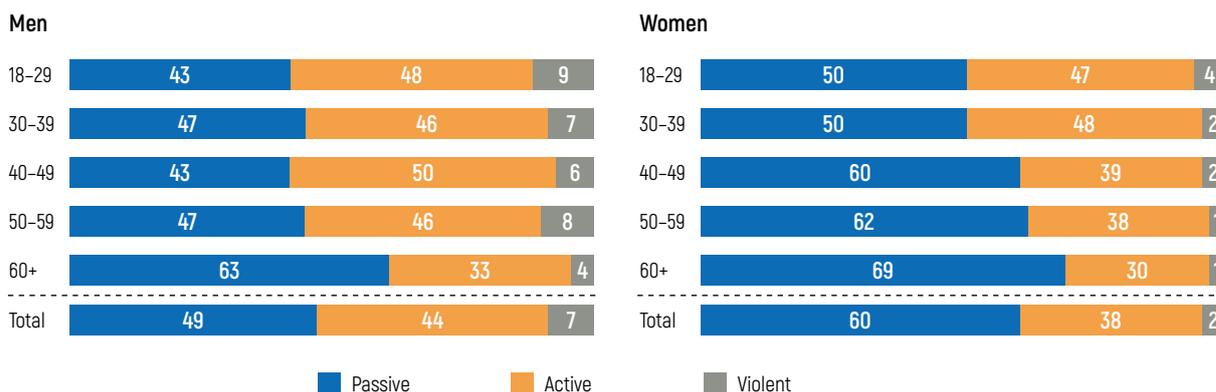


Civic participation intentions

Age

Age emerges as an important factor for civic engagement intention. Both men and women above the age of 60 report less readiness to contribute to social change than younger people (see Figure 1). Men and women in the age group 18–40 tend to have a very similar level of readiness to engage in (non-violent) civic activities. The largest difference between men and women in their preference to be active is in the 40–59 age group: 38 percent of women compared to 48 percent of men say they are willing to contribute to social change.

Figure 1. Passive, Active non-violent, and Violent active groups by age, %⁵



Men demonstrate a higher readiness to turn to violence in order to bring about political or social change.⁶ After the age of 60, acceptance of violent engagement among men halves to 4 percent (from an average of 8 percent in the previous age groups). For women, 4 percent in the 18–29 age group say they are ready to resort to violence. This figure decreases by half for the 30–49 age group, and then once more decreasing by half (to 1 percent) for the 50+ age group. In other words, throughout the main part of their adult life, men are much more likely to be willing to resort to violence to effect change.

Occupational status

There is a significant difference in engagement intentions between employed men and women: 44 percent of employed women and 56 percent of employed men say they are willing to take an active action to contribute to change. The lower expression of interest among women may be linked to the additional expectations that are often placed on women: besides regular paid work, they are also expected to take care of the household, children, etc., which leaves less time for other activities. A person's occupational status impacts on their intentions to be involved in civic affairs. Both unemployed men and women (but especially women) are more passive in their civic participation intentions than those who are employed, which can be partially explained by the fact that they are more isolated from social networks⁷. At the same time, women who are on maternity leave or are running a household declare the same level of interest in contributing to social change as employed women. This does not hold true for men, however. Those few men who are running a household or are on parental leave report much more passive intentions compared to employed men (however, these results need to be treated with caution, given the small number of men on paternity leave/looking after the household – see Table 1). Besides, women could self-select themselves away from civic and political life, as they may qualify this sphere as being exclusive for men.

⁵ From here and onwards the percentage may not sum up to 100% because of the rounding.

⁶ Specifically, this group of respondents confirmed that they are "willing to use all means of change available to me, including violence if necessary".

⁷ Unemployed people also see much less opportunities for civic engagement than those who are employed: (5.7 vs 6.4 on a scale of 0 to 10) and report much less actual civic engagement (1.9 vs 2.5, respectively).

Table 1. Civic engagement intentions by occupation and sex, %

		Passive civic engagement intentions	Active civic engagement intentions (including those with 4% of violent-active intentions)
Employed (including part-time work and self-employment)	Men	44	56
	Women	55	45
	Total	49	51
Running a household / looking after family / paternal leave	Men*	58	42
	Women	54	46
	Total	55	45
Unemployed	Men	54	46
	Women	59	41
	Total	56	44
Total (including retired and students)	Men	49	51
	Women	60	40
	Total	55	45

* Note that the number of (male) respondents in this category is too small for valid analysis (N=47)

Talking the talk and walking the walk?

Levels of civic engagement

Does a person's intention to be active translate into actual engagement? Overall, civic engagement is low for both women and men in eastern Ukraine. While men state that they are more willing to take political and social actions to improve society (see above), their expressed readiness to be active does not mean that they are actually more engaged than women – rather on the contrary (see Table 2). Women are more active than men in most civic activities (except for participating in public demonstrations, but the difference here is minor), ranging from volunteering to voting (see a full list of activities in Figure 2). This may indicate that men exaggerate their readiness to be active citizens or / and that women underestimate their actual engagement and contribution. Moreover, actual civic engagement increases with age: the highest participation in civic activities among men is in the 60+ age group, while women reach the peak of civic activity already by 30.

Table 2. Civic engagement by age and sex, %

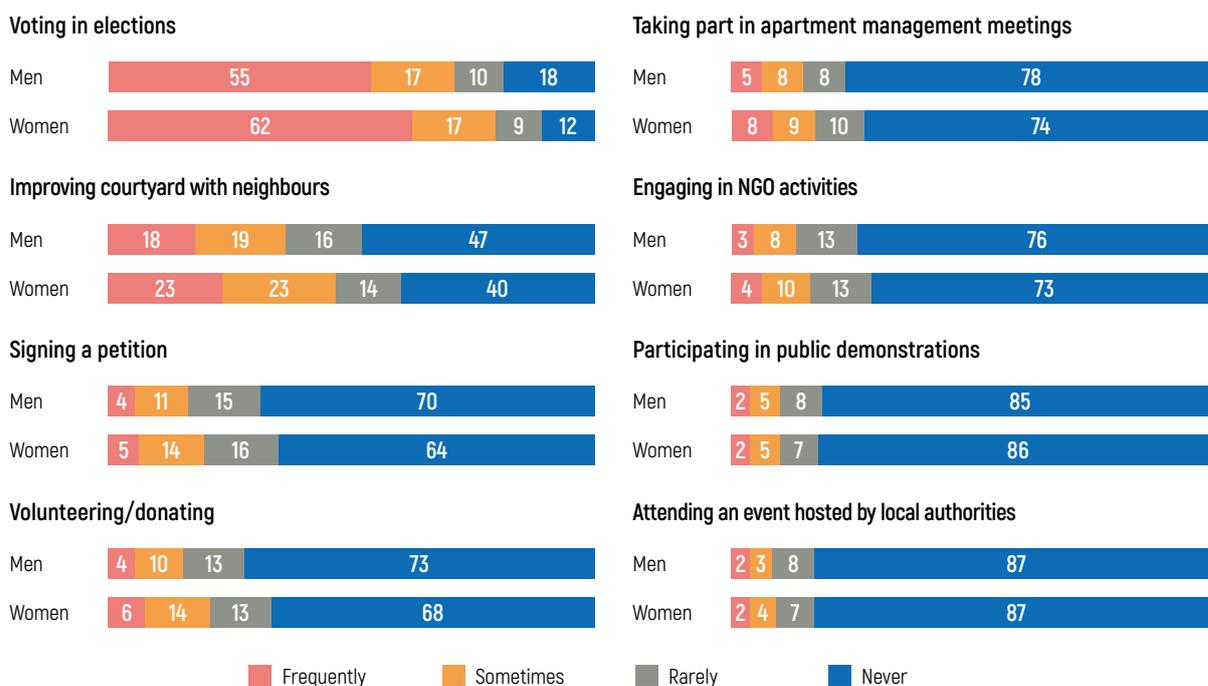
Age group, years	Share of those who participate in civic activities (average for all activities presented in Figure 2 below)		
	Men	Women	Total
18-29	16	20	18
30-39	21	27	24
40-49	23	26	24
50-59	24	27	25
60 +	25	28	27
Total	22	26	24

Types of civic engagement activities

There are important differences between women and men and the types of civic activities they engage in (see Figure 2). The largest difference is for activities aimed at managing or improving housing and/or housing territory together with neighbors, where women are much more engaged. In other words, women tend to be more engaged in activities aimed at improving the environment in the direct vicinity of their own home. This appears to be due to a combination of norms (i.e., taking care of the home and the household is considered to be more suitable for women) and interest (i.e., women prioritizing such activities). Women also tend to be much more engaged in volunteering and charity work than men, which may be related to the prevailing norm that women should be engaged in these types of 'softer' activities aimed at supporting vulnerable and/or less well-off groups in society.⁸

For political activities associated with participatory democracy, such as attending an event organized by local authorities or taking part in public demonstrations, both men and women report very similar and low involvement. This could be because women and men alike do not see much value in participation in these kinds of activities⁹, and/or that the local authorities are not sufficiently engaging residents in decision-making processes (e.g., by not providing fora for such activities). At the same time, voting in elections is the most regular activity reported by both women and men: 79 percent and 72 percent, respectively, vote frequently.

Figure 2. Civic engagement by type¹⁰, % (ranked in ascending order)



⁸ The possibility that these types of activities are more attractive to women should, however, not be disregarded merely as a result of prevailing norms and stereotypes.

⁹ According to USE modelling results, the major factors contributing to civic engagement for both women and men are sense of agency (the degree to which one feels that ordinary people can change things in their community) and human security, including economic and political security, among other things). See USE Brief *Active and tolerant citizenship: revealing drivers and barriers of participation*.

¹⁰ The list of civic activities was elaborated together with authorities and civil society representatives in the five eastern oblasts and in Kyiv.

Spilling the blood: when men and women turn violent

Men and women who say they are willing to turn to violence to achieve change will not necessarily resort to violence at some point in their lives. Some of the people in this group may well use only social and political means or choose to stay passive unless they see a strong need for using violence to bring about the changes they see necessary. The same caveat applies to representatives from other groups: in real life passive people may end up as active citizens.

Civic engagement intentions do, however, tend to predict actual behavior well. While the level of aggressive behavior is higher among men than among women, those men and women who report violent engagement intentions also report equally higher levels of actual acts of aggression¹¹ (see Table 3). Specifically, men who are ready to use violence to achieve changes in society score 4.5 points (on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means absence of aggressive behavior and 10 – prevalence of aggressive behavior in one's life), compared to 2.4 points for those men who voiced either passive or active civic intentions. Women have a similar pattern: 3.4 points for those who accept violent civic engagement intentions compared to 1.1 for passive or active engagement.

Table 3. Aggressive behavior by groups of civic intentions, scores (0 – 10 scale)

	Aggressive behavior among those who have		
	passive civic engagement intentions	active civic engagement intentions	violent civic engagement intentions
Men	2.4	2.4	4.5
Women	1.1	1.2	3.4*
Total	1.6	1.8	4.3

* Note that the number of (female) respondents in this category is too small for valid analysis (N=49)

Do actions make a difference: optimistic and pessimistic perspectives

Believing that your engagement in civic activities matters is an important motivator for action, especially given that civic engagement does not always explicitly lead to material payoffs to those engaged, but rather benefit a specific segment of society, the wider community or the country. Despite being more socially active, women tend to be somewhat less optimistic than men in believing people like them can change things if they want to (44 percent of women vs 53 percent of men).¹² In other words, less women than men think of themselves as social change agents. Data on civic optimism¹³ supports this finding: women are not only more pessimistic about the future, but also more nostalgic about the Soviet past¹⁴.

Both men and women tend to be similarly pessimistic about the opportunities for change, whether through themselves or elected representatives: less than 50 percent believe that they or elections can change things for the better. Voting discipline, however, remains high among women and men, while participatory forms of democratic governance remain quite under-utilized.

¹¹ Aggression was measured through questions about physical acts of aggression (hitting someone, getting into fights), as well as making threats.

¹² This is part of one's sense of agency: the degree to which one feels that ordinary people can change things in their community.

¹³ Civic optimism was measured through questions about perceptions about whether the future and/or previous generations will be/were better or worse off.

¹⁴ Soviet nostalgia was measured through questions about e.g., the quality of family life and value system during the Soviet Union era.

Conclusions

The findings presented in this report suggest that civic engagement intentions and behavior differ between men and women. These findings thus have implications for how social cohesion can be encouraged both in terms of community activity and interaction with authorities.

LOWER BARRIERS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION. Political participation of women and men is one of the types of civic engagement that can have a great impact on overall development in the country, including by fostering better communication between citizens and the institutions that serve them. Enabling equal access to participation for both women and men in events initiated by the government or international community on the one hand, and encouraging online modes of interaction, along with the participation of constituency-based civil society in policy dialogue on the other hand, could help to overcome barriers related to time and physical access. Other activities, such as establishment of fora where residents can express their views without fear of repercussions and increasing the credibility and transparency of the election process and other political activities are important as well (see USE Brief *Active and tolerant citizenship: revealing drivers and barriers of participation*).

ADDRESS VIOLENT TENDENCIES IN CIVIC ACTIVISM. Mitigate and address violent tendencies, which are significantly more pronounced in men than in women by providing venues where residents can express their views and thus reduce the rationale for alternative (i.e., violent) forms of communication. The group of people that report a willingness to resort to violence to achieve change needs to feel assured that their views and concerns have been heard and are taken into account. Hence, public discussions on topics that matter the most to various groups in society (and here it is important to properly assess in a participatory manner what these issues are) can help policy makers to better understand the concerns, grievances and fears of all groups, including those inclined to violent activism, to be able to properly address them. Additionally, joint community projects (building on housing improvements with neighbors being the most common for the participation of men and women alike) can play an important role in promoting greater contact between groups, and serve as a violence reduction strategy, in particular between different social and political groups that may be in open or latent conflict (see USE brief *Active and tolerant citizenship: revealing drivers and barriers of participation*).

INCREASE SENSE OF AGENCY. Empower women by illustrating success stories of civic engagement, to ensure that their participation is more conscious and motivated, rather than based on prevailing gender stereotypes and norms (which might lead them to believe that women are less impactful), as well as remove barriers for their civic engagement in terms of available time and or opportunities for such activities.

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Annex A: Glossary of terms

Aggression – extent to which one is aggressive in daily life (e.g., frequently getting into fights and different kinds of verbal or physical confrontations)

Active civic engagement intentions – willingness to engage in civic and political matters to change current conditions in one's community using non-violent means

Civic engagement – degree to which one participates in community groups, housing associations, volunteering, town hall meetings, voting in elections and other civil-political activities and processes

Civic optimism – extent to which the present generation is believed to be in a better position than the past one or the future generations

Passive civic engagement intentions – lack of willingness to engage in civic and political matters to change current conditions in one's community

Sense of agency – degree to which one feels that ordinary people can change things in their community

Soviet nostalgia – extent to which one regrets the collapse of the Soviet Union and believes that life was better before 1991

Violent civic engagement intentions – willingness to engage in civic and political matters to change current conditions in one's community by using all means, including violence if necessary

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