



Polaris

Supporting Multilevel
Governance in Ukraine



SPECIFIC FEATURES OF INFORMING AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY RESIDENTS UNDER MARTIAL LAW

Research Results

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey Period: 10–21 November 2025

The objective of the research was to identify the current state, key needs, and challenges in the field of informing and engaging residents through a survey of local self-government officials. Furthermore, it aimed to determine directions for improving instruments and approaches to citizen participation in resolving issues of local importance under the conditions of martial law.

The research was conducted in the format of an online survey (internet-based questionnaire with self-completion) among specialists in information and engagement within local self-government bodies, as well as other officials responsible for communications and related functions in territorial communities, predominantly small urban, settlement, and rural communities. A total of 344 respondents from 268 communities across 23 regions of Ukraine participated in the study (excluding the Luhansk region and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea).

The research results demonstrate that under martial law, digital channels for informing and engaging residents dominate in the territorial communities of Ukraine. These channels combine the official resources of local self-government bodies (websites, social media pages) with informal instruments, such as chats and groups in messaging applications. While this model allows for the rapid dissemination of information and the coverage of various population groups, it simultaneously reveals a structural vulnerability: the low level of digital literacy among a portion of the residents, particularly in small communities, limits the effectiveness of communication. Despite the declared readiness for non-discriminatory and inclusive approaches, practices of equal access to information and participation remain uneven and significantly depend on the personnel capacity of the communities. The key internal barriers identified include the high workload of employees, personnel shortages, and the insufficient professionalisation of communication functions.

In the field of resident engagement, representatives of local self-government bodies consider the passivity and mistrust of residents, along with restrictions caused by martial law, to be the primary challenges. At the same time, local self-government officials demonstrate a demand for digital solutions for rapid communication and comprehensive digitalisation. The research also identified a significant institutional gap: the absence of specialised structures or clearly defined officials responsible for resident engagement in the majority of communities. Another key problem is the existence of outdated community Charters or their complete absence, which complicates the implementation of legislative requirements regarding participation. Overall, the results confirm the need not only for new instruments but also for the systemic institutional strengthening of participation and communications at the local level.

Key Recommendations Based on Research Results: At the local and regional levels, the priority is to bring the Community Charters and council regulations into compliance with the requirements of the legislation on democracy by the end of 2026, with a clear definition of public participation procedures, the transparent publication of decisions, and access of residents to the work of the councils. Important steps include the creation of 'Public Participation' sections on websites, the provision of equal access to participation instruments for internally displaced persons and youth from the age of fourteen, the designation of individuals responsible for communication and engagement, as well as the conduct of educational activities for residents, particularly regarding the use of digital instruments.

At the national level, it is necessary to provide methodological and digital support to local self-government bodies: to develop unified recommendations regarding the implementation of laws in the field of democracy, to create a state electronic platform for public consultations, and to strengthen training programmes for local self-government officials in the field of communication and resident engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The Swedish-Ukrainian Polaris Programme 'Supporting Multilevel Governance in Ukraine', which is implemented with the support of the Government of Sweden through Sida and executed by SALAR International, exerts efforts to increase the capacity of Ukrainian communities in various fields. One of the tasks of the Programme is to facilitate informing and engaging community residents in resolving issues of local importance.

As part of the implementation of this direction, the Programme, together with experts from the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research and with the assistance of national associations of communities, conducted a survey of local self-government representatives on the topic 'Specific Features of Informing and Engaging Community Residents under Martial Law'.

Under the conditions of the ongoing full-scale war, the approaches of local self-government bodies to informing and engaging residents have undergone significant changes. The communication work of local self-government bodies found itself at the intersection of two requirements: on the one hand, the need for transparency, openness, and inclusiveness, and on the other hand, the necessity to consider security risks, the promptness of decisions, and changes in priorities in the work of local officials. In such conditions, achieving a balance between publicity and security becomes one of the key management challenges.

The war has also significantly affected the residents of territorial communities themselves. A portion of active citizens was forced to relocate, change their activities, or redirect their energy towards priority issues: supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine, volunteering, assisting internally displaced persons, or ensuring the basic needs of their families.

At the same time, in 2024–2025, a number of normative legal acts aimed at strengthening the transparency and openness of the activities of local self-government bodies and the implementation of forms of resident participation defined by law came into force. This created an additional workload for local councils and executive bodies, but simultaneously set new standards of work and the expected quality of interaction with citizens.

In aggregate, these factors make the topic of informing and engagement one of the key topics for communities under martial law, as it directly affects trust, resilience, and the ability of local self-government to make effective decisions during times of war.

It is worth noting that a similar study was conducted in 2022 by the previous Swedish-Ukrainian project PROSTO, thus the responses of the respondents in 2025 allow for a comparison of individual results and the tracking of the dynamics of relevant indicators.

The objective of the research is to identify, through a survey of local self-government officials, the primary needs, state, and challenges in the field of informing and engaging residents in resolving issues of local importance in territorial communities.

Research tasks:

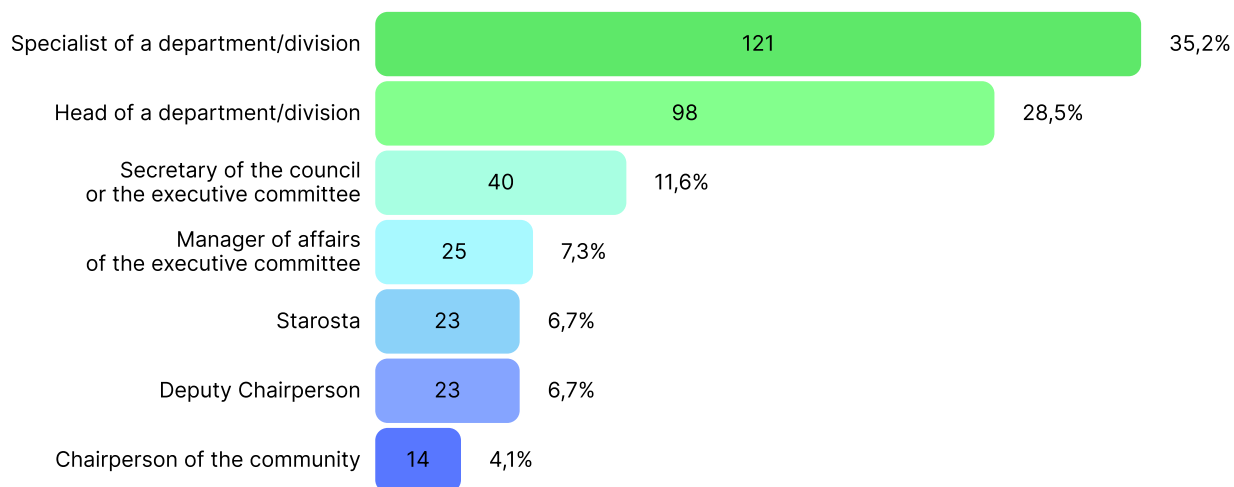
- To analyse the impact of martial law on the processes of informing and engaging citizens in territorial communities.
- To study the current needs of local self-government bodies regarding the improvement of existing or the implementation of new instruments for informing and engaging residents.
- To identify the needs of local self-government bodies for new instruments and approaches required for the implementation of legislative changes of 2024–2025.

METHODOLOGY

Objects of the research:	• Specialists in informing and engagement of local self-government bodies, other individuals responsible for communications in communities, and specialists performing related functions; • Geography of the research: predominantly small urban, settlement, and rural territorial communities.
Research method:	Survey of local self-government representatives — internet-based questionnaire. Method of completion: self-completion of the questionnaire.
Method of questionnaire distribution:	Targeted electronic mail distribution to representatives of local self-government bodies.
344 respondents — representatives of 268 communities from 23 regions of Ukraine — participated in the survey (Luhansk region and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea are absent).	
Methods of analysis:	Quantitative and qualitative analysis methods of the responses collected via the online survey (Google Forms) were used to process the research results.
Research limitations:	The research has a number of limitations related to the voluntary participation of respondents and self-selection, which may affect the representativeness of the sample. Responses are unevenly represented across different regions, types of communities, and groups of officials. Part of the data, especially from open-ended questions, reflects the subjective assessments of the respondents.

ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

1. Officials who took part in the survey



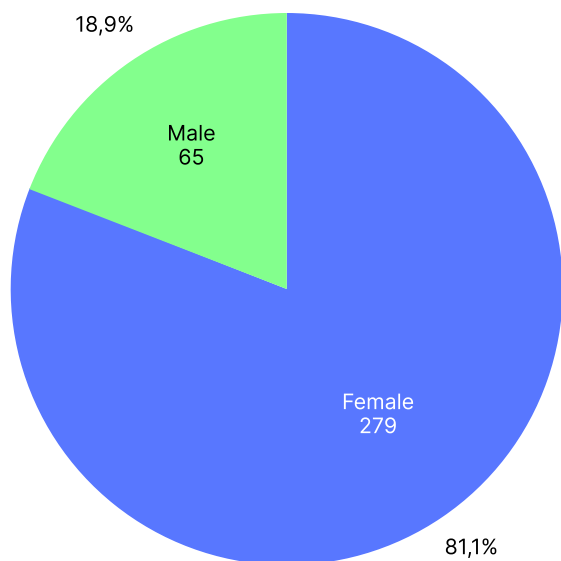
CONCLUSIONS

The largest share of respondents consisted of officials holding such positions as:

1. Chief Specialist of the general / organisational / information department
2. Head of the organisational work department
3. Head of the information activity and communications department
4. Head of the economic development and investments department
5. Secretary of the council
6. Manager of affairs of the executive committee
7. Starosta
8. Deputy Chairperson
9. Chief Specialist for communications and public relations
10. Head of the digital transformation / IT / digital development department

The largest group of representatives of local self-government bodies who took part in the survey consists of middle-level officials (specialists and heads of departments), as well as officials responsible for communications, organisational work, and projects.

2. Gender of the respondents who took part in the survey

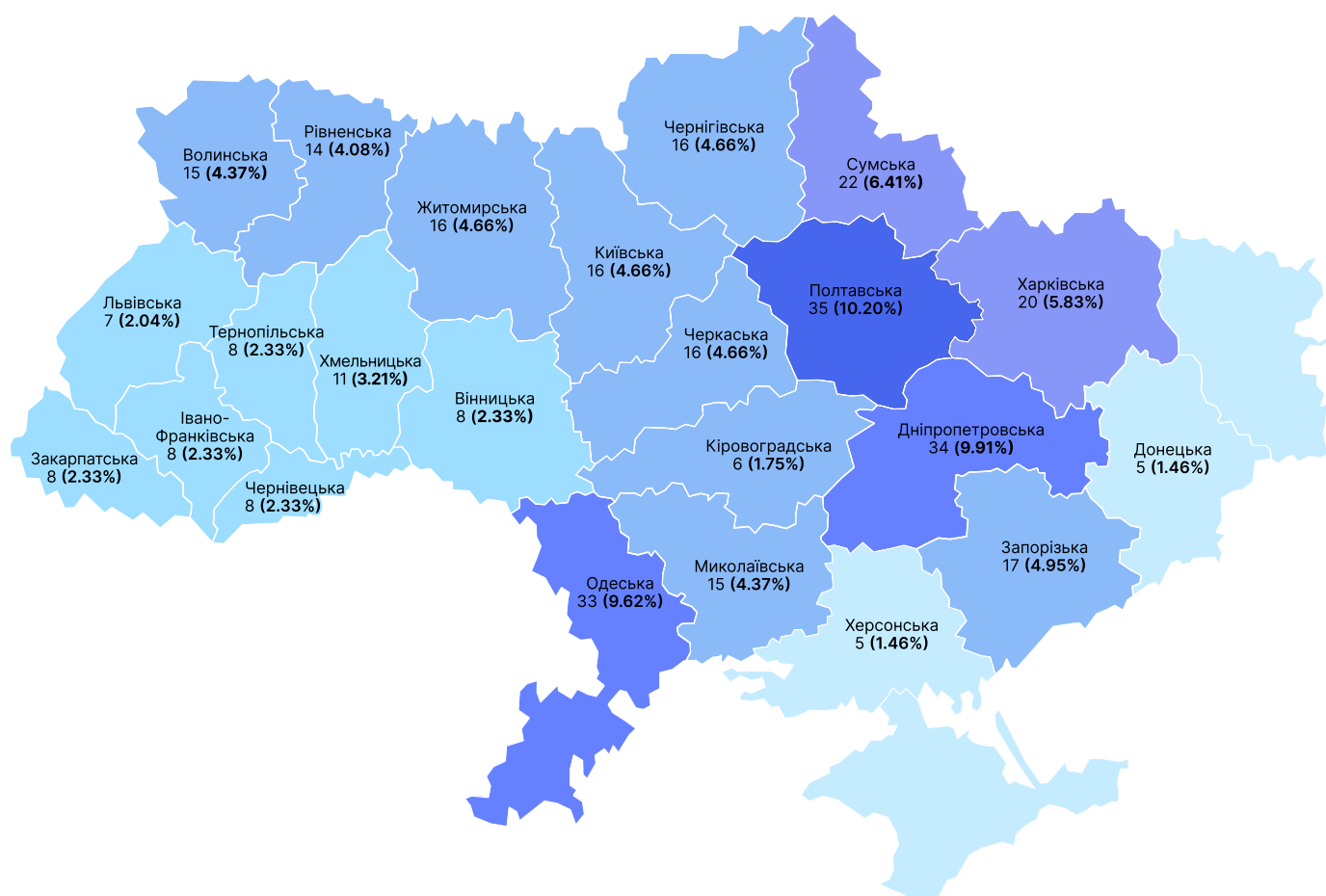


CONCLUSIONS

Among the 344 respondents who took part in the survey, 279 individuals (81.1%) were women, while there were 65 men (18.9%), which indicates a significant dominance of women in the personnel composition of local self-government bodies.

Such a gender structure indicates a high representation of women in local self-government, which is a characteristic tendency for local self-government bodies of the basic level (rural, settlement, and city councils).

3. Number and distribution of respondents by regions

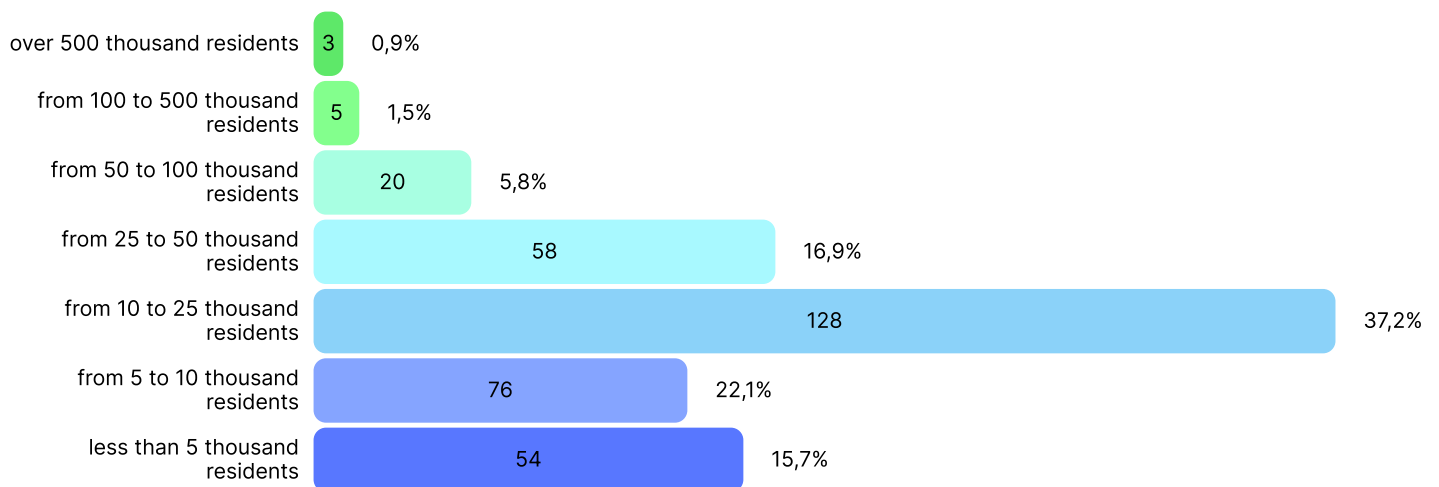


CONCLUSIONS

The greatest participation in the survey was shown by representatives of the Poltava region — 35 respondents (10.2%), the Dnipropetrovsk region — 34 respondents (9.9%), and the Odesa region — 33 respondents (9.6%), which indicates their high involvement in the research. Notable activity was also demonstrated by the communities of the Sumy region (22 respondents, 6.4%) and the Kharkiv region (20 respondents, 5.8%).

In general, the distribution of responses covers all regions of Ukraine, which ensures representativeness and allows for making generalised conclusions regarding the situation in the communities of different regions.

4. Categories of territorial communities that took part in the survey



CONCLUSIONS

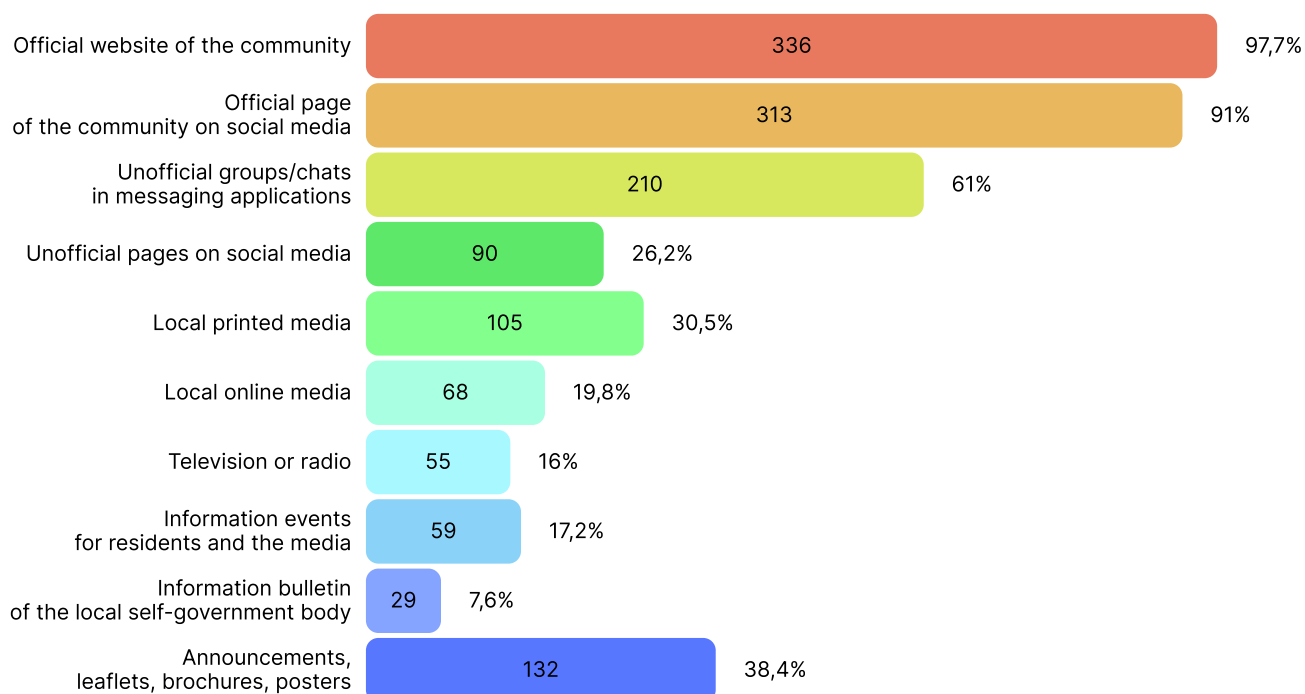
The survey shows that the largest share of responses comes from communities with 10 to 25 thousand residents — 128 respondents, which constitutes 37.2% of all 344 surveyed.

The second largest group is communities with 5 to 10 thousand residents, which provided 76 respondents, or 22.1% of the sample. Communities with 25 to 50 thousand residents covered 58 respondents (approximately 16.9%), which indicates their notable but smaller representation. Small communities with a population of up to 5 thousand are represented by 54 officials, which equals 15.7%.

Only a small number of officials represent medium and large-sized communities: 20 respondents (5.8%) — communities of 50–100 thousand, 5 respondents (1.45%) — communities of 100–500 thousand, and only 3 respondents (0.87%) — communities with a population of over 500 thousand.

In summary, 92% of responses come from small and medium-sized communities with a population of up to 50 thousand, which indicates the dominance of precisely such communities in the survey. Overall, the survey reflects the real picture of the administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine, where the majority of communities are of small and medium size.

5. Informing channels used by local self-government bodies for communication with residents



CONCLUSIONS

The vast majority of Councils use the official website as a key informing channel — this was reported by 336 respondents, which constitutes 97.7% of all surveyed officials.

Almost equally popular are the official pages of communities on social media, which are used by 313 respondents (91%). Unofficial groups and chats in Viber and Telegram are actively used in communities — they were noted by 210 respondents, or 61%, which demonstrates the significant role of informal communication channels.

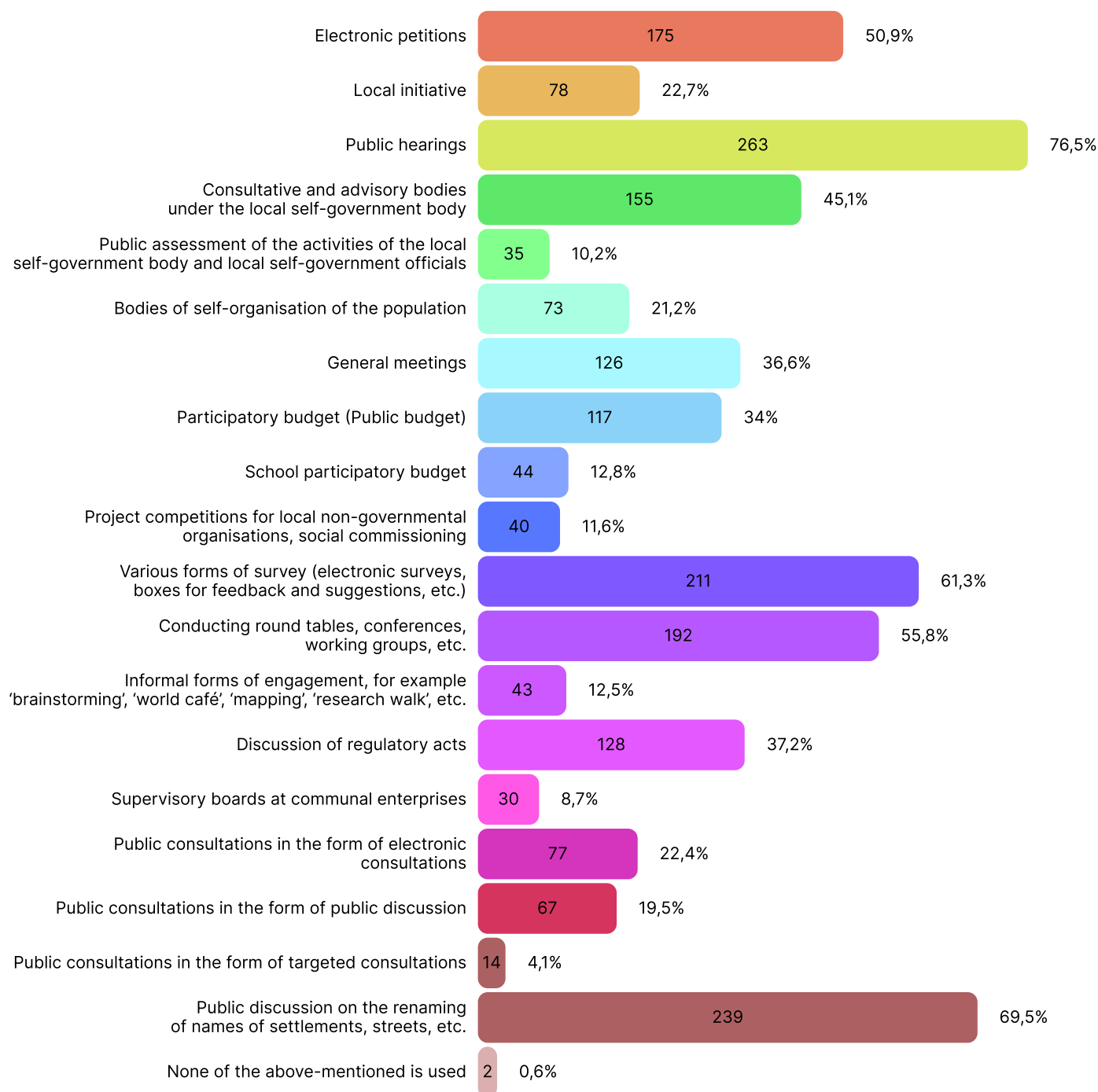
Traditional printed products, in particular leaflets, announcements, brochures, and posters, continue to play a substantial role: they are used by 132 respondents (38.4%).

At the same time, such channels as local online media (19.8%), television/radio (16%), and information events (17.2%) remain auxiliary communication instruments, which reflects the limited resources or the specific nature of the information policy of the communities.

In summary, the results indicate that digital methods of informing dominate in communities, as over 90% of officials noted the official website and social media as the main channels of communication with residents.

Overall, the structure of responses demonstrates a combination of formal and informal channels, where official resources provide basic informativeness, while chats and printed materials supplement it, ensuring the coverage of different population groups.

6. Resident engagement instruments used for making important decisions in territorial communities



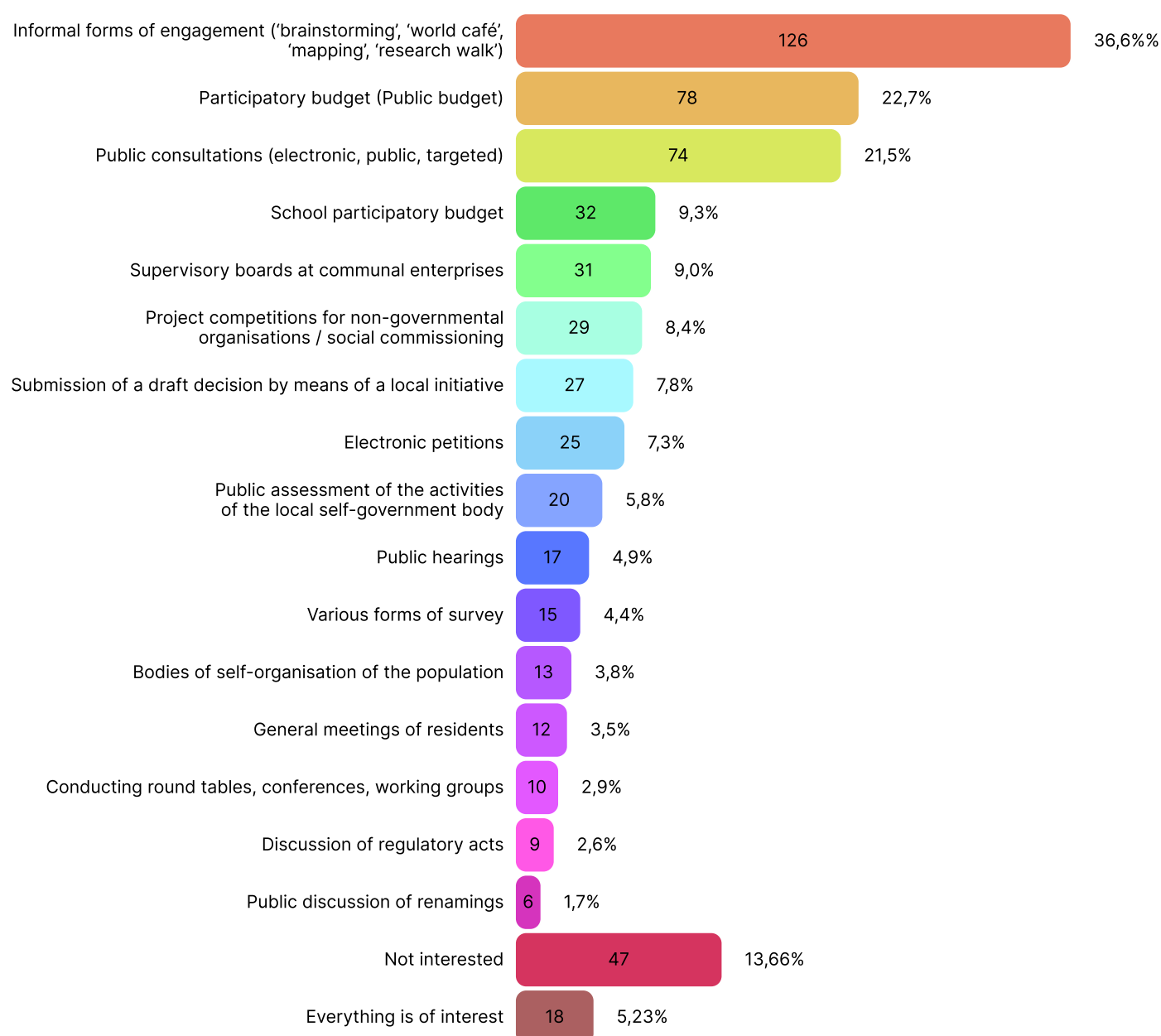
CONCLUSIONS

Most often, local self-government bodies use such a public participation instrument as public hearings for engaging residents in making important decisions. This was chosen by 263 officials, which constitutes 76.5% of all respondents.

Various forms of surveys (electronic surveys, suggestion boxes, etc.) are also actively applied, as noted by 211 respondents, or 61.3%. Round tables, conferences, and working groups are also popular, being applied in 192 communities (55.8% of respondents), which demonstrates the demand for live discussion formats. A significant share of officials — 175 individuals (50.9%) — noted the use of electronic petitions, which confirms the gradual digitalisation of participation instruments.

Participation through general meetings, the participatory budget, consultative and advisory bodies, and the discussion of regulatory acts covers 36.6%, 34%, 45.1%, and 37.2% of respondents respectively, which demonstrates the diversity of forms of democratic procedures at the local level.

7. Regarding which of the above-mentioned resident engagement instruments would you like to learn more or introduce in the community?



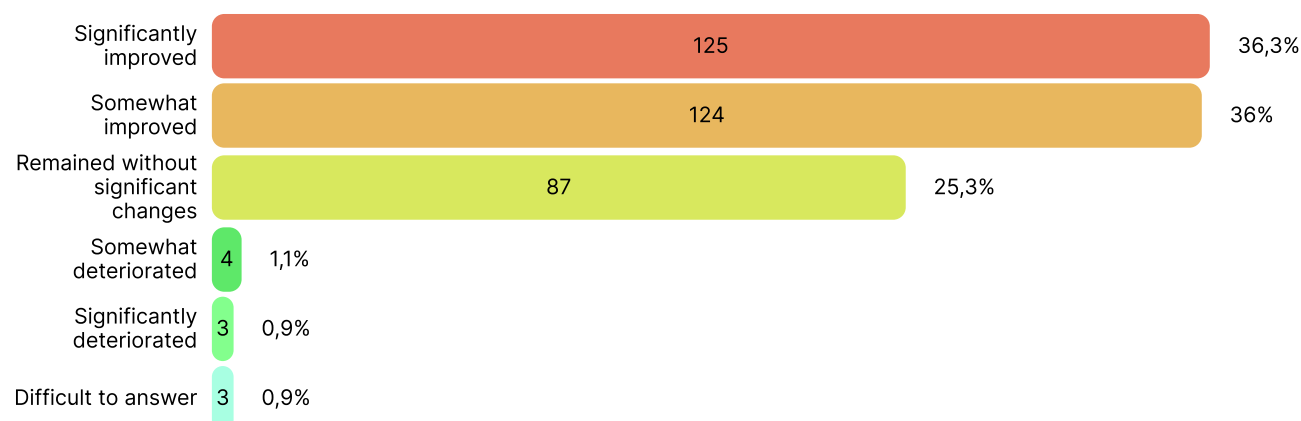
CONCLUSIONS

Respondents showed the greatest interest in informal forms of engagement — they were noted by 126 individuals (36.6%), which confirms the need of communities for modern interactive methods of cooperation with residents. High interest is also directed towards the participatory budget and the school participatory budget, which were mentioned by a total of 142 respondents (41.3%), indicating the desire of local authorities to involve residents in the planning and distribution of the local budget. Significant attention was drawn to electronic instruments — electronic consultations, electronic petitions, and online surveys, which were mentioned by a total of 119 respondents (34.6%), demonstrating the growing role of digital communication under the conditions of war and population mobility.

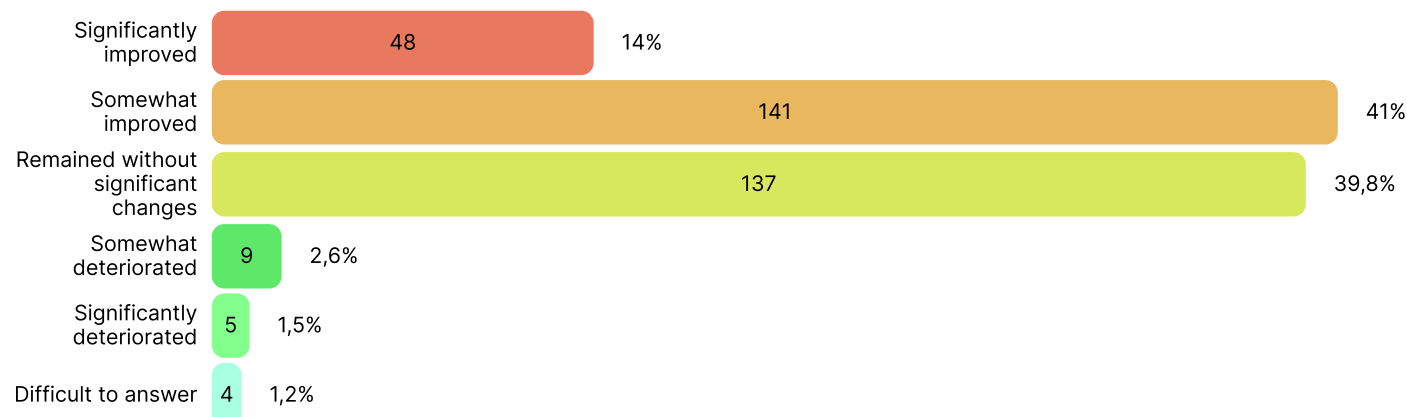
Consultative and advisory bodies, supervisory boards, and bodies of self-organisation of the population constitute the second largest group of interest — 96 individuals (27.9%) wish to develop them, which indicates a demand for institutionalised participation mechanisms and a need for creating substitute bodies in settlements where councils disappeared due to amalgamation. At the same time, 47 respondents (13.7%) answered 'Not interested', which may indicate a partial lack of need for improving engagement instruments or the overworking of local self-government personnel. However, a group of 18 respondents (5.2%) stands out positively, noting that they are interested in all instruments.

8. In your opinion, how has the situation in the community in the field of informing and engaging residents changed over the last year?

In the field of informing residents



In the field of engaging residents in decision-making



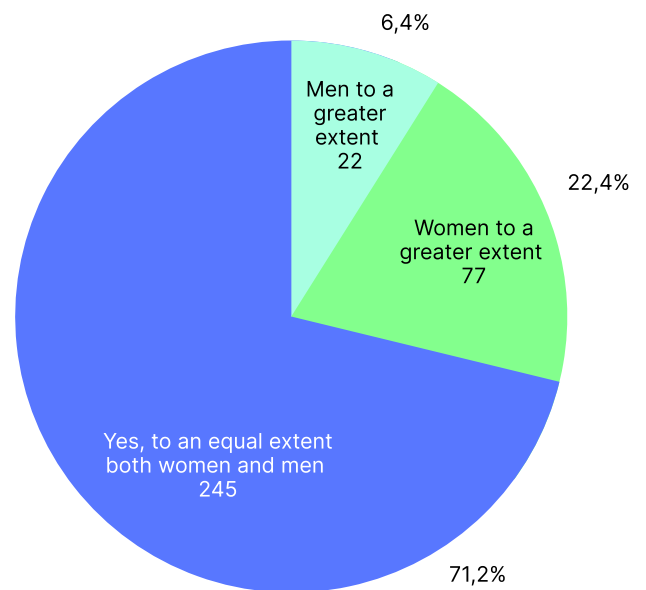
CONCLUSIONS

In the field of informing residents, a total of 249 respondents (72.4%) noted that the situation has improved: 125 respondents (36.3%) noted 'significantly improved', and 124 (36.1%) — 'somewhat improved', which indicates a positive view of local self-government officials on this sphere of interaction with residents, which, if possible, should be compared with the opinion of community residents. 87 respondents (25.3%) indicated that the situation in informing has not changed, and 7 individuals (2%) stated its deterioration.

In the field of engaging residents, 48 officials (14%) noted a significant improvement, and 141 (41%) — a moderate improvement, meaning that together 189 respondents (55%) recorded a positive tendency. 137 respondents (39.8%) stated that resident engagement remained without changes, and 14 individuals (4.1%) reported deterioration, which demonstrates slower rates of participation development compared to informing.

The 'difficult to answer' indicator was 6.7% (7 individuals) in the field of informing and 1.2% (4 individuals) in the field of engagement. In summary, respondents record progress significantly more often in the field of informing (72.4%) than in the field of engagement (55%), which indicates a more dynamic development of information instruments in communities. It can also be stated in general that local self-government officials and employees see an overall positive movement towards openness, however, engaging residents in decision-making is progressing more slowly and requires additional attention and stimulation.

9. Are women and men currently engaged in decision-making at the local level to an equal extent?



CONCLUSIONS

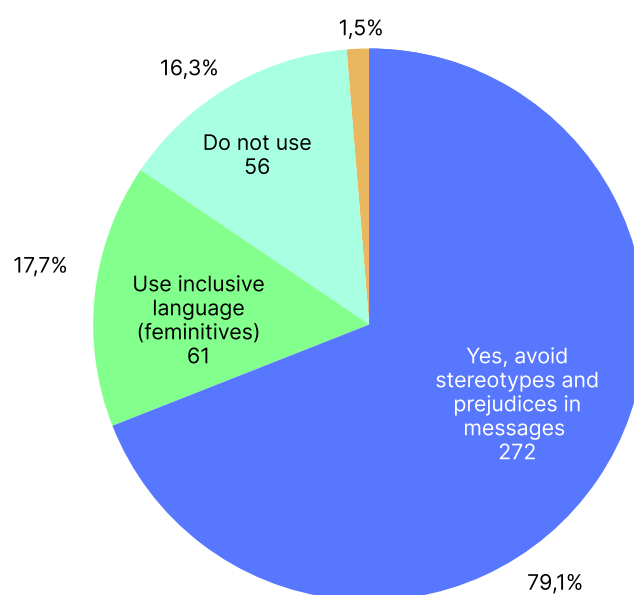
The vast majority of respondents — 245 individuals (71.2%) — believe that women and men are engaged in decision-making at the local level to an equal extent, which indicates a rather positive perception of the gender balance among local self-government officials and employees.

Another 77 respondents (22.4%) noted that women participate in decision-making processes to a greater extent, which may be related to the fact that among those surveyed, the absolute majority were women (279 individuals or 81.1%). Only 22 respondents (6.4%) believe that men are engaged to a greater extent, which is the lowest indicator among the responses and indicates the absence of a perceptible advantage of men in local decision-making processes in the eyes of the officials. Such a distribution of responses shows that the majority of local self-government representatives (over 93%) do not perceive a dominance of men in public participation processes, and some are even inclined to assess the role of women as more active.

In general, 322 out of 344 respondents (93.6%) do not perceive a gender disproportion in favour of men, which indicates a tendency towards balancing the participation of women and men in involvement in decision-making through participation instruments. In general, it can be stated that in the eyes of local self-government officials, the sphere of decision-making at the local level is currently gender-balanced or even one where the activity of women is growing. At the same time, a limitation of this research is the absence of a question regarding the confirmation of equal engagement of women and men in decision-making at the local level, in particular, whether the practice of collecting data with a breakdown by sex and other characteristics of the actually engaged male and female residents is used.

It is important to understand that quantitative indicators actually say very little precisely about access to decision-making. The issue of gender equality requires deeper study in terms of institutional and informal barriers for various population groups (not only women or men, but also women and men with disabilities; women providing childcare, etc.); the representation of women and men in leadership and executive positions; the implementation of special practices designed to encourage the participation of different groups of male/female community residents, etc.

10. Do you use non-discriminatory language for informing or engagement?

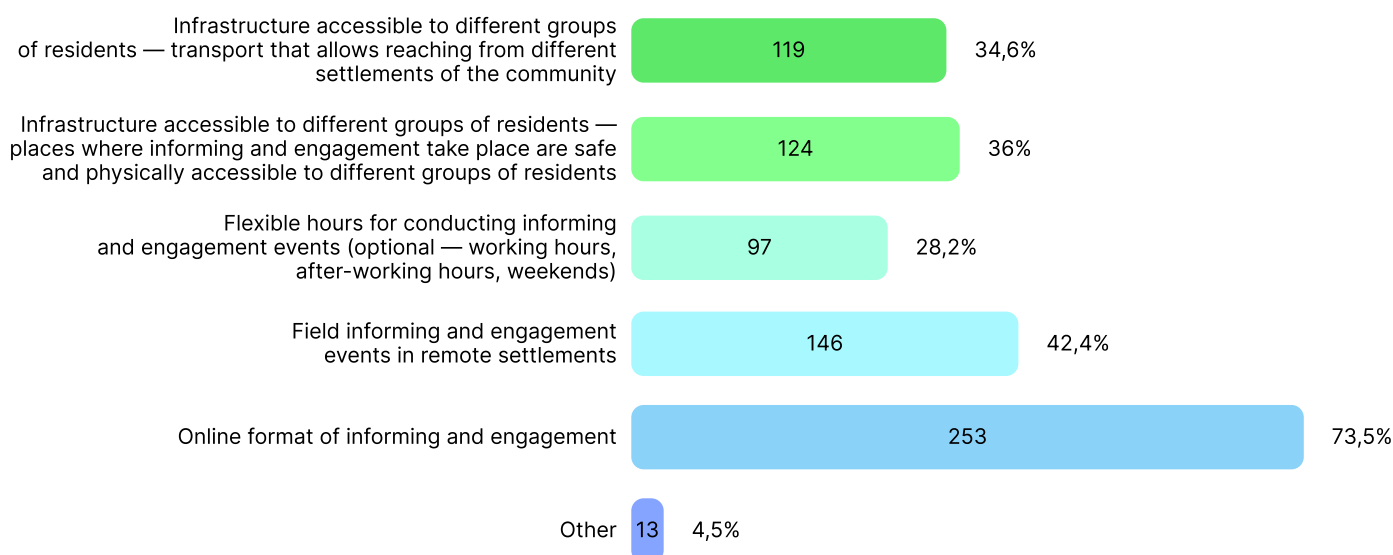


CONCLUSIONS

Among 344 local self-government officials and employees, 272 respondents (79.1%) reported that they use non-discriminatory language in their work, which indicates a high level of awareness of the importance of correct and neutral communication.

At the same time, only 61 respondents (17.7%) noted that they apply inclusive language, including feminitives and gender-neutral forms, which demonstrates a still limited but gradual transition to modern communication standards. In summary, the results show that communities are generally moving towards the implementation of non-discriminatory speech standards, but the level of application of inclusive practices remains uneven. Overall, local self-government bodies demonstrate readiness for the development of modern communication approaches but require additional training and the institutional consolidation of equality principles in official informing.

11. In what way is the provision for the participation of different groups of residents for informing and engagement ensured?

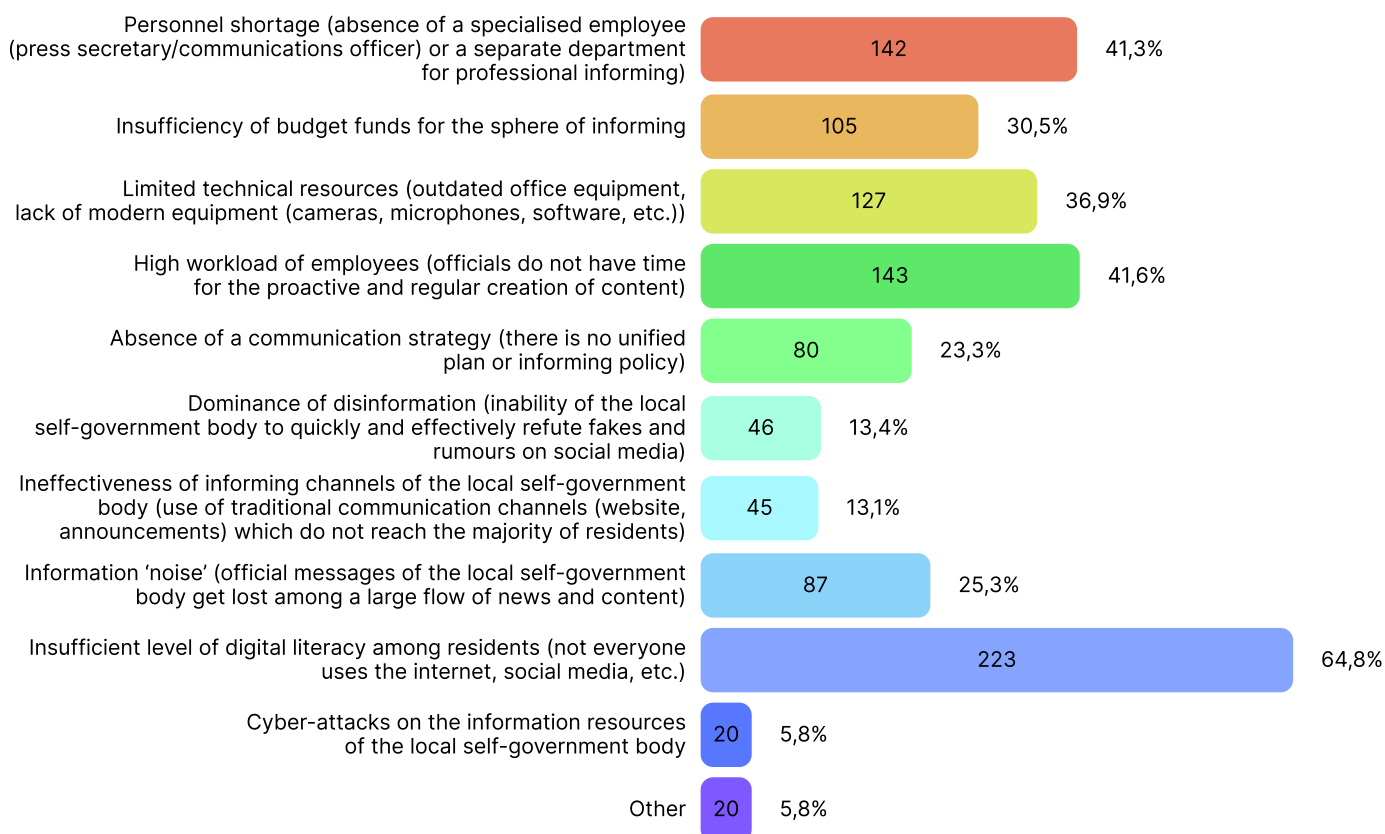


CONCLUSIONS

The most common mechanisms for ensuring resident participation are online formats of informing and engagement, which were chosen by 253 respondents (73.5%). Field events in remote settlements were supported by 146 officials (42.4%), which indicates the significance of offline interactions. The accessibility of event venues as being safe and physically accessible for different groups of residents was noted by 124 respondents (36%), demonstrating the understanding by authorities of the importance of inclusiveness during the conduct of events. Accessible transport infrastructure as a way of ensuring equal opportunities for participation was noted by 119 respondents (34.6%), which is particularly relevant for large and rural territorial communities. Flexible hours for conducting events were chosen by 97 respondents (28.2%), indicating the need to consider work schedules, family responsibilities, and the various life rhythms of residents.

In summary, it can be stated that representatives of local self-government bodies are already actively applying both digital and traditional approaches to resident engagement, with the online format, namely the official council website, being dominant. The general tendency demonstrates the aspiration of local self-government bodies to ensure inclusiveness and equal access for different population groups, but the sphere of infrastructure accessibility and the flexibility of event formats requires further reinforcement.

12. What risks, difficulties, and challenges do the authorities face in the field of informing residents?



CONCLUSIONS

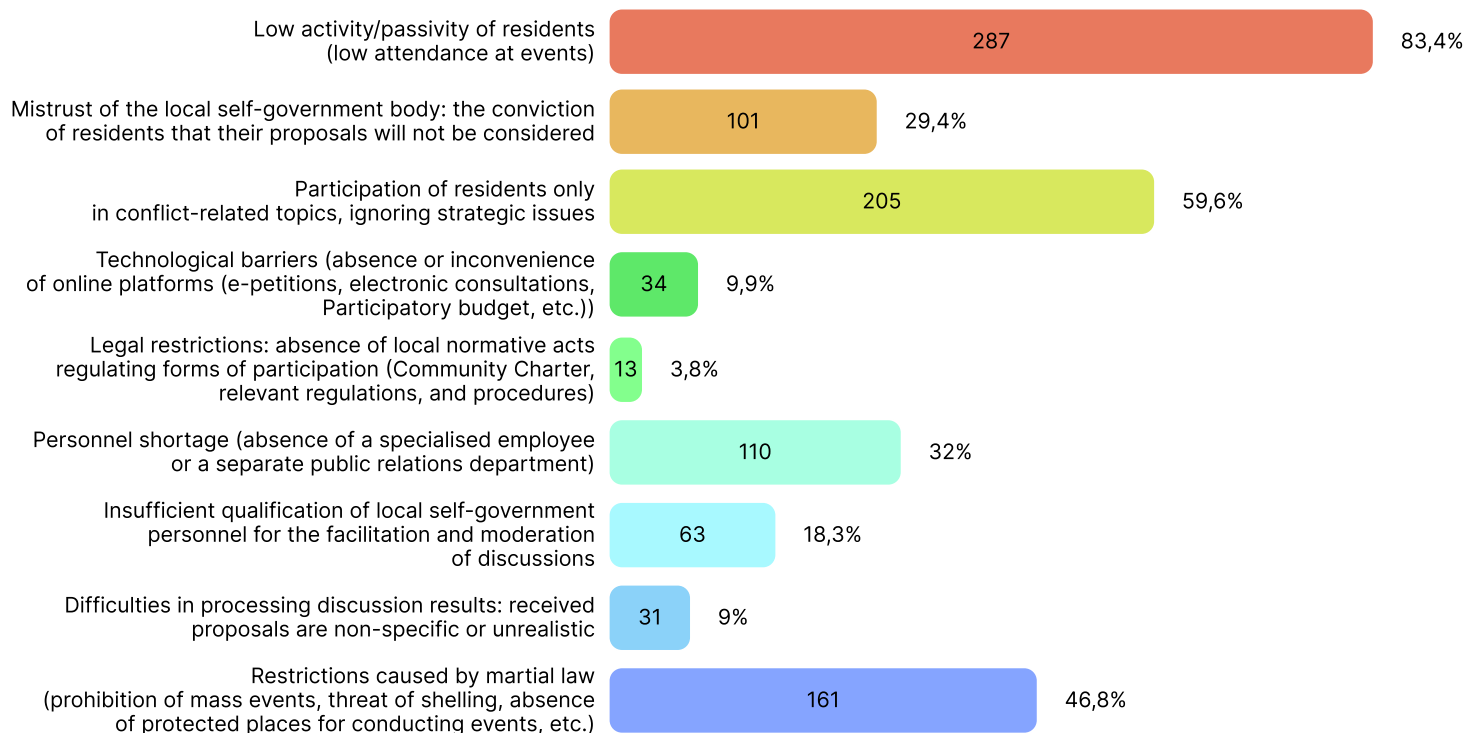
The most common problem identified by local self-government bodies is the insufficient level of digital literacy among residents: this challenge was marked by 223 respondents (64.8%), making it a key barrier to effective informing and communication. At the same time, according to the results of previous answers, local self-government bodies use precisely digital interaction instruments in their work with residents.

The high workload of employees ranks second among the problems — it was noted by 143 officials (41.6%), which indicates that even when instruments are available, employees often physically do not have enough time to ensure high-quality communication. Personnel shortage, meaning the absence of communications specialists, was identified by 142 respondents (41.3%), confirming a systemic shortage of professionals capable of professionally conducting the information policy of the community.

An important technical obstacle is the limited material and technical base, noted by 127 individuals (36.9%) — this complicates the creation of modern content and affects the quality of information delivery. Problems with substantive communication, in particular information noise and the loss of official messages, were noted by 87 respondents (25.3%), while the ineffectiveness of existing channels was highlighted by 45 individuals (13.1%), indicating the need to update the formats of interaction with residents.

Significantly fewer respondents, 46 individuals (13.4%), named the dominance of disinformation as a risk, and 20 employees (5.8%) face cyber-attacks, which although less common, requires the strengthening of the information security of communities.

13. What risks, difficulties, and challenges do the authorities face in the field of resident engagement?



CONCLUSIONS

The most common challenge for local self-government bodies has been the low activity of residents: 287 respondents (83.4%) reported that communities almost do not get involved in participation.

More than half of those surveyed — 205 officials (59.6%) — noted that residents participate mainly in conflict-related issues, while strategic topics remain of little interest or unnoticed.

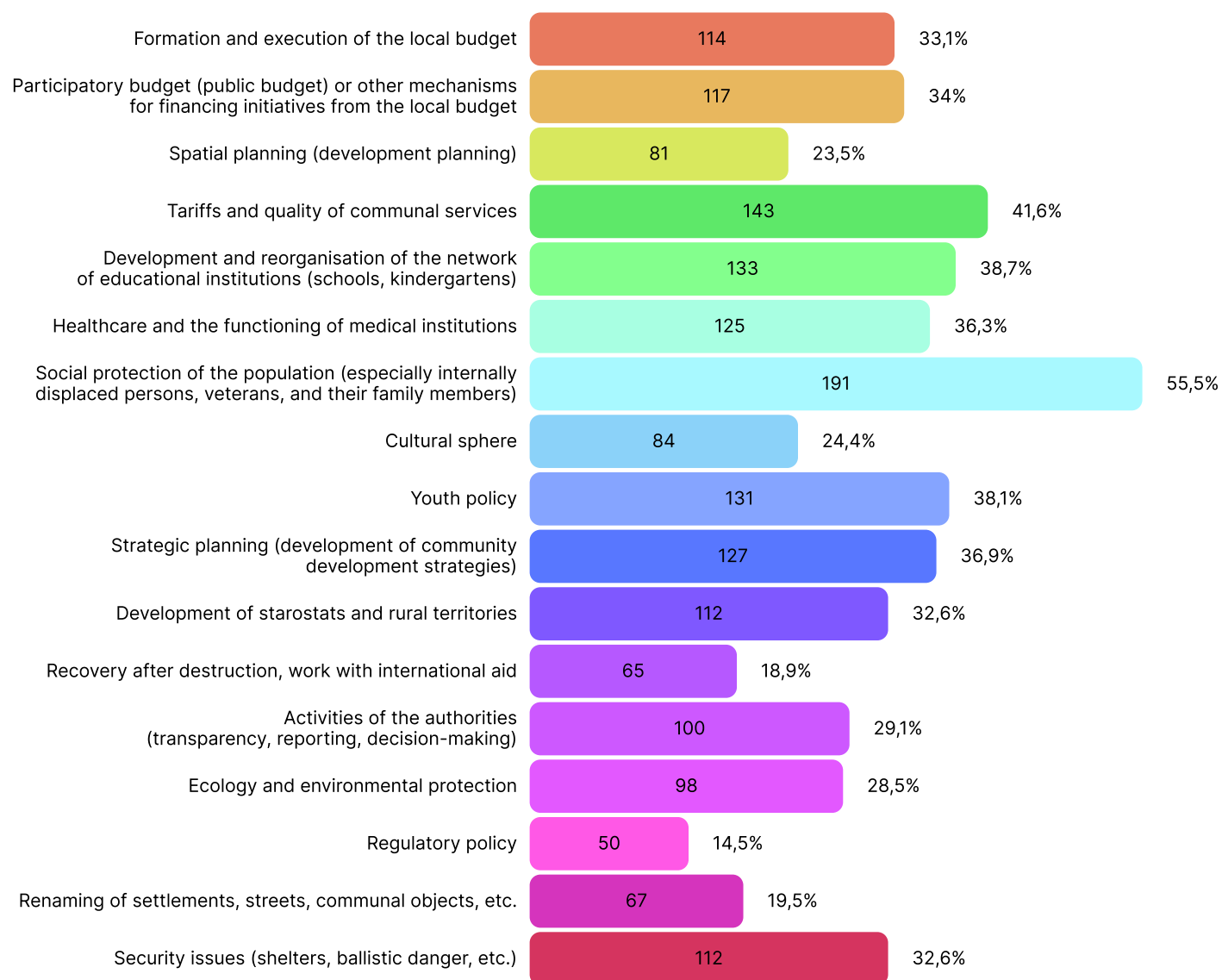
The impact of mistrust towards local authorities is also significant: 101 respondents (29.4%) believe that people do not believe that their proposals will be considered.

Personnel issues are a notable problem — 110 responses (32.0%) indicated a shortage of specialists, and another 63 respondents (18.3%) reported insufficient qualification of personnel for moderating and facilitating engagement processes.

A serious external factor is martial law: 161 participants (46.8%) emphasised that restrictions related to security make it impossible to conduct public events.

Technological barriers continue to restrain engagement: 34 officials (9.9%) speak of the absence or inconvenience of online platforms, and 31 respondents (9.0%) — of difficulties in processing and qualitatively interpreting residents' proposals.

14. In which spheres or issues of the life of your community is active informing and engagement of residents most needed?



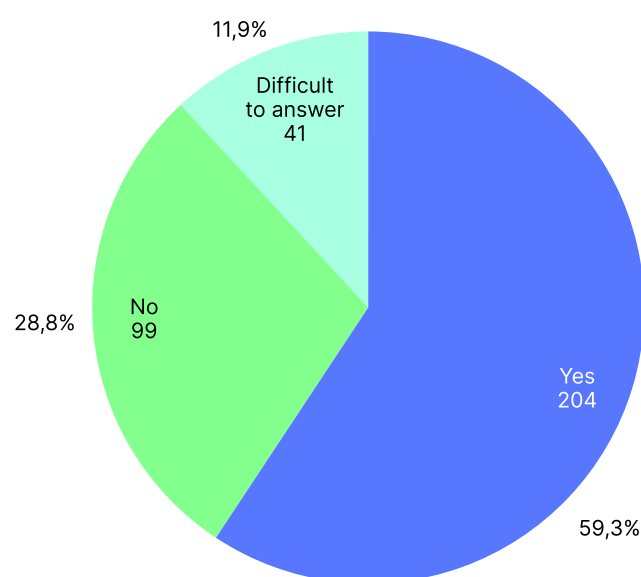
CONCLUSIONS

Respondents named social protection of the population as the most critical sphere where local authorities need active informing and engagement of residents — 191 responses (55.5%), which indicates the high relevance of supporting internally displaced persons, veterans, and vulnerable groups during wartime. The second most significant sphere was the communal sphere (tariffs and quality of services) — 143 responses (41.6%), demonstrating the constant concern of residents regarding the quality of basic services and needs. A significant share of officials — 133 respondents (38.7%) — emphasises the need to engage residents in issues of the development and reorganisation of educational institutions, which is important in the context of optimising the school network in communities. The topics of youth policy (131 respondents, 38.1%) and strategic planning (127 responses, 36.9%) also received high support, reflecting the level of problematic nature of this issue due to the outflow of youth from communities.

Issues of healthcare (125 respondents, 36.3%), the development of starostats (112 respondents, 32.6%), and security issues (112 respondents, 32.6%) became important in connection with war risks and changes in the functioning of local systems. It is important that the participatory budget aroused interest in 117 respondents (34%), and the formation and execution of the local budget — in 114 respondents (33.1%), which indicates a demand for financial transparency, literacy, and a sufficiently high interest of residents in the sphere of the formation and distribution of the local budget.

The results show that local self-government officials to a large extent understand the importance of engaging residents — primarily in the spheres of social support, communal services, education, planning and distribution of the local budget, and the strategic development of the community. The general picture demonstrates a high level of awareness of the importance of engaging residents in interaction with local authorities and an understanding of the need to introduce systemic approaches for this.

15. Is there a separate structural unit (department) or a separate official in the structure of the local self-government body whose primary area of activity is informing residents?



CONCLUSIONS

In the majority of local self-government bodies, there is a structural unit or a designated official responsible for informing residents: 204 respondents, constituting 59.3%, confirmed the presence of such a function in the community.

At the same time, almost a third of those surveyed — 99 individuals (28.8%) — reported the absence of a specialised unit or official, which indicates the unevenness of organisational approaches in different communities.

It is indicative that 41 respondents (11.9%) were unable to clearly determine whether such functions are provided for in the structure of their local self-government body, which may indicate insufficient internal informing or an unclear distribution of powers.

A significant share of 'No' and 'Difficult to answer' responses (collectively 40.7%) shows that in many communities, there is a lack of personnel resources, which reduces the quality and speed of communication with the population.

16. If so, what is the name of the structural unit of your local council (or what is the position of the specialist) responsible for informing the residents of the community? What are its main tasks? How long ago was it created?

194 out of 344 respondents provided an answer

Name of the structural unit of the council or the position of the specialist responsible for informing the residents of the community.

Departments / sectors of information activity and communications / public relations

28–30%

General / organisational / organisational-personnel department

20–22%

Separate official (chief / leading specialist for communications)

18–20%

Units of digital transformation / IT / digitalisation and communication

12–14%

Departments of internal policy / information policy

8–9%

Deputy Chairperson / Advisor to the Chairperson

5–6%

Communal enterprises / media centres / information centres

3–4%

CONCLUSIONS

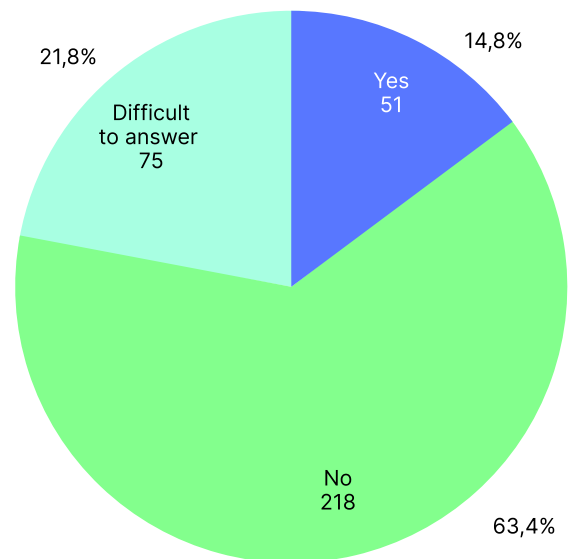
The analysis of open-ended answers shows a significant diversity in the names of the units that carry out the informing of residents: from the 'Information Activity and Communications Department' to the 'Digitalisation Sector', 'Media Centre', 'Strategic Communications Department', or even communal enterprises that perform informing functions, which indicates non-standardisation and different levels of institutional capacity of communities.

Most often, communities mention one chief specialist who combines communication functions with several others (clerical work, personnel work, internal policy, maintaining military records, working with appeals).

This indicates an underestimation by the community leadership of the importance of systemic communication with residents: the relevant powers are assigned to an employee who already has a significant workload. As a result, the specialist is overloaded and does not have the opportunity to effectively ensure the proper informing of residents.

The majority of communication units were created in 2020–2021, namely after the completion of the administrative-territorial reform and the formation of new communities, while individual communities indicate 2023–2025, which testifies to the gradual institutional strengthening of the sphere of communications with residents.

17. Is there a separate structural unit (department) or a separate official in the structure of the local self-government body whose primary area of activity is resident engagement?



CONCLUSIONS

Only 51 respondents (14.8%) noted that in the structure of their local self-government body, there is a separate unit or official responsible for resident engagement, which indicates a low level of institutional capacity of communities in this sphere.

The vast majority — 218 respondents (63.4%) — confirmed that there is no such unit or position in the community, which indicates a systemic absence of organisational mechanisms aimed at working with population engagement.

A rather significant share — 75 respondents (21.8%) — answered 'difficult to answer', which indicates that in these local councils, such structural units are also highly likely to be absent. This indicates that in the majority of communities, the work on resident engagement is either carried out by relevant departments/administrations within their spheres of responsibility, has a fragmented nature, or is not conducted at all.

In summary, it can be stated that the vast majority of local councils do not have a formalised structure responsible for resident engagement.

This negatively affects the development of participation instruments and the quality of communication between the authorities and residents.

18. If so, what is the name of the structural unit of your local council (or what is the position of the specialist) responsible for resident engagement? What are its main tasks? How long ago was it created?

54 out of 344 respondents provided an answer

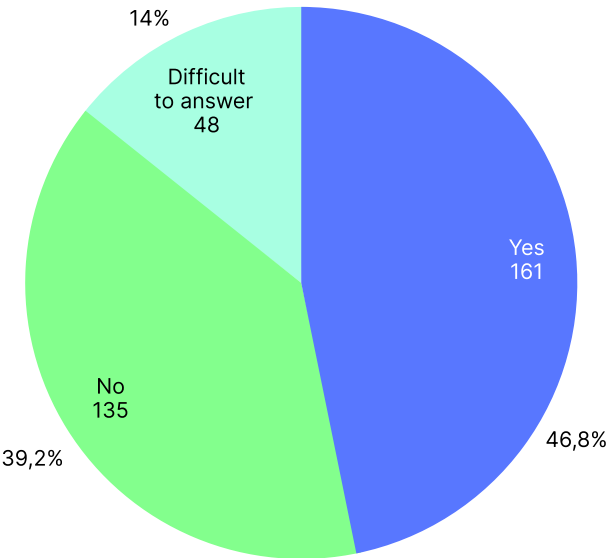
The most common structural units responsible for resident engagement are:



CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of responses demonstrates that usually the function of citizen engagement is performed by the following departments: information activity and communications department, organisational department, internal policy department, economic development, as well as individual specialists for communications, which indicates fragmentation and the absence of a unified approach to the institutional provision of engagement. A portion of communities (about 10–12 mentions) assigns the functions of resident engagement to starostas, existing bodies of self-organisation of the population, or created Citizen Activity Centres, which indicates an aspiration to compensate for the absence of specialised units with alternative mechanisms. Research shows that the majority of such units were created after 2020, and individual ones — only in 2023–2024. This testifies to the gradual awareness by local self-government bodies of the need for a systemic policy of resident engagement at the local level.

19. Does the territorial community have a Charter?



CONCLUSIONS

161 out of 344 respondents (46.8%) noted that their territorial community has a Charter, which indicates a rather moderate overall indicator.

At the same time, 135 respondents (39.2%) reported that there is no Charter in the community, meaning that in 40% of communities, the rights of residents to use public participation instruments are currently blocked. Another 48 respondents (14.0%) chose the ‘difficult to answer’ option, which may also indicate, most likely, the absence of Charters in these communities.

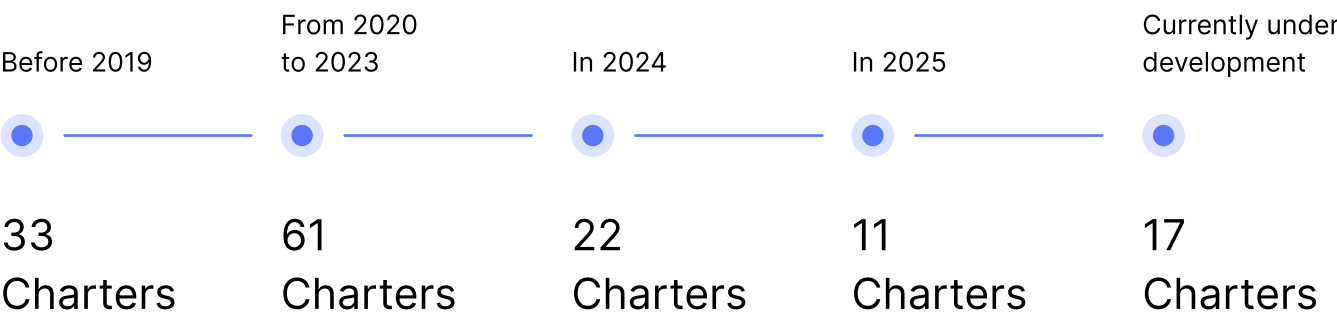
In total, 183 communities (53.2%) either do not have a Charter or their representatives do not know about its existence, which significantly limits the possibility of systemic development of resident participation.

In summary, it can be concluded that the situation requires the strengthening of institutional capacity — in particular, the development, updating, and promotion of Charters, so that local authorities can fully ensure the implementation of the right to public participation and informing about their activities defined by legislation for their residents.

20. If the answer is ‘Yes’, specify when the last version of the Charter was adopted

161 out of 344 respondents provided an answer

Date of adoption of the Community Charter



CONCLUSIONS

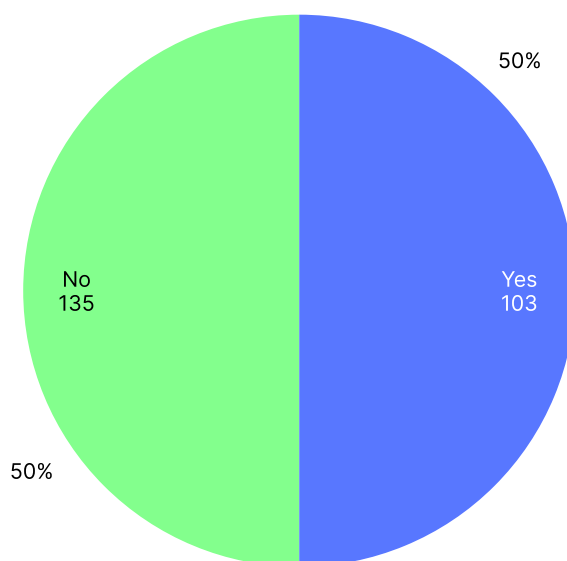
161 out of 344 communities answered that they have an adopted Charter, which constitutes 46.8%. Another 17 communities indicated that their Charters are currently under development.

The largest share of adopted Charters falls within 2020–2024 — 83 communities (24.1% of 344). Charters adopted before 2019 were noted by 33 communities (9.6% of 344), and in 2025 — by 11 communities (3.2% of 344). At the same time, 17 communities (4.9% of 344) do not remember the date of adoption.

It can be assumed that community Charters adopted in 2025 comply with the requirements of the Law of Ukraine No. 3703 ‘On Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government’ and include the entire list of public participation instruments defined by the Law.

21. Are internally displaced persons included in the composition of residents according to the provisions of the Charter?

206 out of 344 respondents provided an answer



CONCLUSIONS

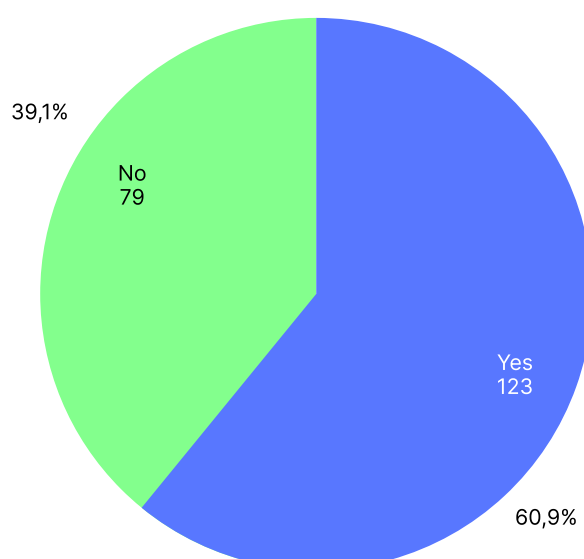
According to the research results, to the question about the inclusion of internally displaced persons in the composition of residents in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, an equal number of officials — 103 out of 206 (50.0%) — answered 'yes' and 'no', which indicates the absence of a unified approach among communities regarding the definition of the status of IDPs.

The Law on Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government, which entered into force at the beginning of 2025, equated the rights of IDPs with the rights of permanent residents in terms of participation in resolving issues of local importance. At the same time, 103 respondents noted that IDPs are included in the composition of residents in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.

However, in 2025, Charters were adopted in only 11 communities, meaning that precisely they could formally reflect and implement the requirements of the law in the charter provisions. In this regard, justified doubts arise concerning the reliability of the statement that the rights of IDPs are already actually regulated and ensured in 103 communities. In summary, the indicated results testify to the need for the normative and procedural regulation of the status of IDPs through the updating of Charters to ensure equality of rights and the effective integration of internally displaced persons into local life.

22. Do youth from the age of 14 have the right to use public participation instruments in accordance with the norms of the Charter?

202 out of 344 respondents provided an answer



ВИСНОВКИ

За результатами опитування 123 із 202 респондентів (60,9%) зазначили, що молодь віком від 14 років має право користуватися інструментами громадської участі відповідно до положень Статуту громади. Водночас 79 службовців (39,1%) вказали на відсутність такого права.

Варто враховувати, що обов'язок органів місцевого самоврядування забезпечити можливість участі молоді з 14 років у використанні окремих інструментів громадської участі виник лише у січні 2025 року — після набрання чинності Законом України «Про народовладдя на рівні місцевого самоврядування». У зв'язку з цим у експертів, які готували дослідження, виникають обґрунтовані сумніви щодо коректності частини наданих відповідей. Водночас у 2025 році Статуту ухвалили лише 11 громад, і саме вони мали можливість закріпити вимоги закону в статутних нормах та привести їх у відповідність до нового регулювання.

Зокрема, показник у 60,9% може свідчити не стільки про фактичну наявність відповідних статутних норм, скільки про низький рівень обізнаності респондентів щодо чинного правового регулювання або про ототожнення бажаної практики в громаді з реально закріпленими нормами. Дослідження вказує на необхідність подальшого нормативного уточнення та імплементації положень Закону України «Про народовладдя на рівні місцевого самоврядування» на місцевому рівні.

23. What electronic/digital services and IT programmes does your local self-government body need for effective informing and engagement of community residents?

Electronic service
for conducting
electronic public
consultations

112 (32,6%)

Electronic service
for conducting
a participatory budget
competition

82 (23,8%)

Electronic service
for conducting a school
participatory budget
competition

55 (16%)

Electronic service
for submitting electronic
petitions

79 (23%)

Electronic service
for publishing
information about
the communal property
of the community

61 (17,7%)

Electronic portal of local
self-government
services

131 (38,1%)

Chatbot,
mobile application
for complaints and
suggestions of residents

145 (42,2%)

Geoinformation systems
for community
management

92 (26,7%)

Digital education:
electronic diaries, online
platforms for learning

92 (26,7%)

Electronic system
for recording
documents
of the information
manager

114 (33,1%)

CONCLUSIONS

145 out of 344 respondents (42.2%) consider the introduction of chatbots or mobile applications for receiving complaints and suggestions a priority, which indicates a demand from officials for rapid communication with residents.

131 officials (38.1%) emphasised the need to create an electronic portal of local self-government services, demonstrating the need for comprehensive digital solutions for interaction with residents. 112 representatives of local self-government bodies (32.6%) identified an electronic platform for conducting public consultations as important, while 114 respondents (33.1%) indicated the need for electronic document recording systems, reflecting shortcomings in administrative processes.

In summary, the most in-demand digital services are rapid communication instruments and electronic service portals. The survey results demonstrate that local self-government bodies require comprehensive digitalisation covering both consultation processes and internal administrative procedures.

24. If possible, briefly describe successful examples of informing and engaging citizens in your community that were applied during martial law. If such occurred — provide links with a description of such practices to the community website, social media page, etc.

Only 103 out of 344 surveyed local self-government officials and employees (29.9%) provided examples of successful practices of informing and engaging citizens under martial law, indicating the presence of relevant experience only in individual communities.

The provided positive examples cover various instruments — from informing through official websites and social media to online consultations, electronic petitions, the participatory budget, as well as engaging residents in volunteering activities and mutual assistance to those affected by Russia's military aggression. At the same time, most practices are focused on digital communication channels, which generally corresponds to the conditions of martial law, but is simultaneously problematic given the low level of digital awareness of residents of small and medium-sized communities, as indicated by officials in previous answers.

The results obtained attest to the urgent need for the formation and development of a stable system of interaction between local self-government bodies and citizens, taking into account the restrictions and challenges caused by martial law.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

INFORMING

1. The vast majority of local councils, over 90%, use the official website and official community pages (Facebook) on social media as a key informing channel. Informal communication channels play an important role — unofficial groups and chats in Viber and Telegram (61.0%). Printed materials (leaflets, announcements, brochures) remain a significant informing instrument — they are used by 38.4% of respondents, while local online media (19.8%), information events (17.2%), and television/radio (16.0%) primarily perform an auxiliary function. In summary, the results indicate that digital methods of informing dominate in communities, combining formal and informal channels, where official resources provide basic informativeness, while chats and printed materials supplement it, ensuring the coverage of different population groups.
2. The most common instrument for resident engagement remains public hearings — they are conducted by 76.5% of local councils, as well as various forms of surveys (electronic surveys, suggestion boxes, etc.) — 61.3%. At the same time, live discussion formats are in demand: round tables, conferences, and working groups are applied in 192 communities (55.8%), and electronic petitions are used by 50.9% of councils, indicating the gradual digitalisation of participation. Other instruments also have a notable prevalence: general meetings — 36.6%, participatory budget — 34.0%, consultative and advisory bodies — 45.1%, discussion of regulatory acts — 37.2%, which confirms the diversity of practices at the local level.
3. Local self-government officials wish to increase their knowledge in the direction of informal forms of engagement (36.6%), as well as regarding the participatory budget and the school participatory budget (41.3%), which indicates the desire of local authorities to involve residents in the planning and distribution of the local budget. The demand for digital formats is perceptible: electronic consultations, petitions, and online surveys collectively (34.6%), and institutional mechanisms (consultative and advisory bodies, supervisory boards, bodies of self-organisation of the population) (27.9%). At the same time, 47 respondents (13.7%) noted that information about participation instruments does not interest them.
4. In the opinion of local self-government officials, decision-making at the local level is currently gender-balanced, and in individual cases — with a noticeable strengthening of women's participation. 71.2% noted that women and men are equally engaged in decision-making at the local level; 22.4% believe that the participation of women is more active, and only 6.4% — that men are engaged to a greater extent. At the same time, based on the survey, it is difficult to obtain confirmation of the equal engagement of women and men in decision-making at the local level. In particular, regarding the use of the practice of collecting data with a breakdown by sex and other characteristics of the actually engaged male and female residents. In general, the issue of gender equality requires deeper study in terms of institutional and informal barriers for various population groups (not only women or men, but also women and men with disabilities; women providing childcare, etc.); the representation of women and men in leadership and executive positions; the implementation of special practices designed to encourage the participation of different groups of male/female community residents, etc.
5. The survey results showed that local self-government employees are generally moving towards the implementation of non-discriminatory informing standards, however, the level of application of inclusive practices remains uneven. Overall, local self-government bodies demonstrate readiness for the development of modern communication approaches but require additional training and the institutional consolidation of equality principles in official informing.

6. Most often, resident participation is ensured through online formats of informing and engagement (official Council website, chats and groups in Viber and Telegram, electronic consultations) — they were chosen by 73.5% of respondents, confirming the dominance of digital channels. At the same time, offline approaches remains significant: field events in remote settlements were noted by 42.4%, and the accessibility and safety of event venues were noted by 36.0% of respondents. Components of equal access require further reinforcement, as transport accessibility was noted by 34.6%, and flexible hours for conducting engagement events — by only 28.2%.
7. Problems in informing are caused not only by technical and personnel resources but also by the low digital capacity of residents, which becomes a key barrier to effective communication between the authorities and residents. Although, according to the results of previous answers, local self-government bodies use digital interaction instruments to a greater extent in building a dialogue with residents, which is a rather interesting fact. The high workload of employees ranks second among the problems — it was noted by 41.6% of respondents, indicating that even when interaction instruments are available, employees often physically do not have enough time to ensure high-quality communication. Personnel shortage was identified by 40.0% of respondents, confirming a systemic shortage of professionals capable of professionally conducting the information policy of the community. Accordingly, parallel steps are needed for communities to strengthen communications: personnel development, updating of communication instruments, and increasing the digital literacy of residents.

RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

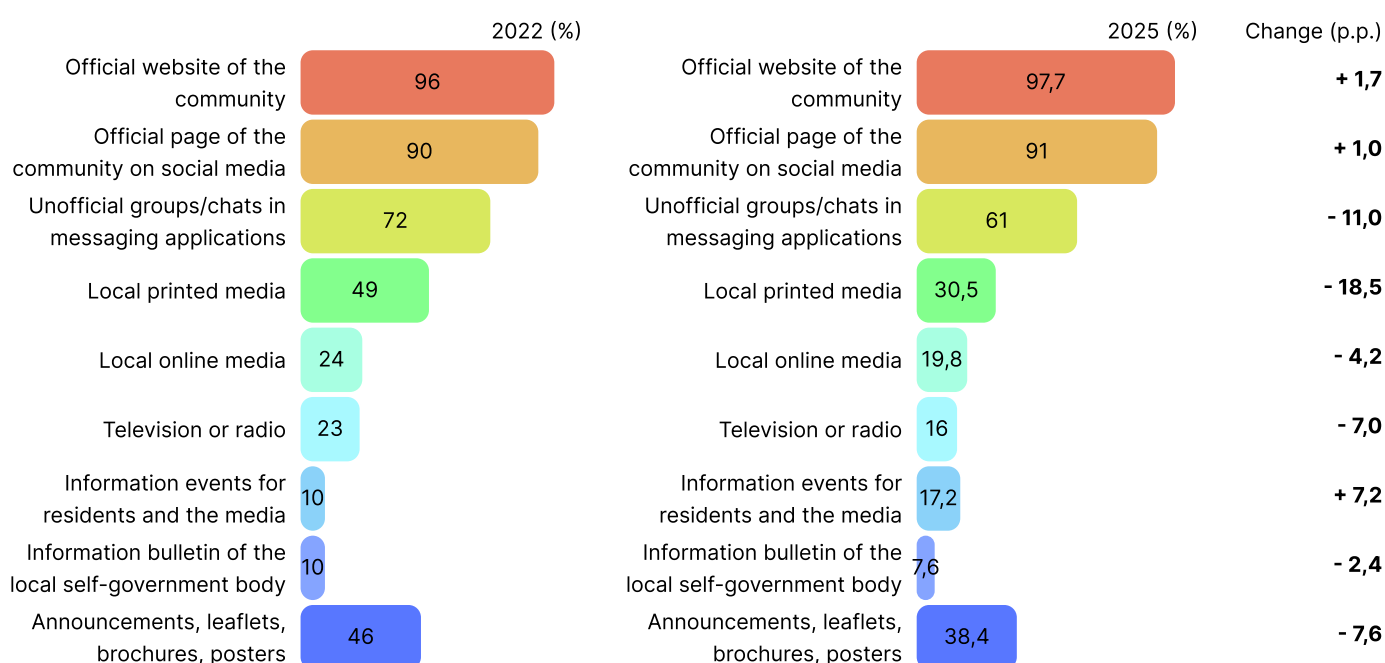
8. The main difficulties faced by authorities in the field of resident engagement are: the human factor (passivity, mistrust, selective interest of residents in community topics) and institutional restrictions of the local self-government body (personnel, technological, regulatory, and security-related). The most common challenge is the low activity of residents — this was indicated by 83% of those surveyed, while 60% noted that people get involved primarily in conflict-related issues, whereas strategic topics interest them significantly less. Mistrust towards local authorities (people do not believe that their proposals will be considered) was named as a barrier by 30% of respondents, and almost 50% emphasised the impact of martial law and security restrictions, which complicate the conduct of public events.
9. 55% of respondents named social protection of the population as the most critical sphere where local authorities need active informing and engagement of residents, which highlights the relevance of supporting IDPs, veterans, and vulnerable groups during wartime. At the same time, 77% of local self-government officials noted the need to engage residents in the budget process: 34% — in the participatory budget, 33% — in the formation and execution of the local budget, which indicates a demand for financial transparency and an increase in the budgetary literacy of residents. Separately, it is worth noting that a third of local self-government employees strive to more actively engage residents in the development of starostats; according to experts, the creation of bodies of self-organisation of the population at the starostat level can contribute to this. In general, officials also realise the importance of resident participation in issues of communal services, health, education, and the strategic development of the community, which confirms the need for systemic approaches to communication and engagement.
10. The research results indicate: 59% of the surveyed communities already have an official responsible for the systemic informing of residents. At the same time, in over 40% of communities, there are no such officials or their powers remain undefined, which highlights the scale of the problem. To improve the quality of interaction with residents, communities need institutional strengthening — the clear consolidation of relevant functions in job descriptions and the formalisation of communication processes.

11. The structure and quality of the work of communication units in territorial communities are extremely heterogeneous. Research data show that 59.3% of communities formally have those responsible for informing residents. About 50% of local councils assigned the communication function to the following departments: information activity and communications, public relations, general, organisational, and organisational-personnel departments. Other communities assign the informing of residents to a single specialist or a combined position. At the same time, actual practice evidences a shortage of personnel, resources, and the professionalisation of communications. This shortage directly reduces the quality of informing residents.
12. The analysis of responses indicates that over 290 out of 344 communities (84%) do not have separate structures responsible for resident engagement, which significantly reduces the quality and sustainability of participatory processes. Overall, communities need to strengthen the institutional provision of engagement by creating specialised units, defining responsible persons, and implementing participation standards, which will ensure a more effective dialogue between the authorities and residents.
13. Communities need to strengthen their institutional capacity in implementing the forms of participation defined by legislation. In particular, through the development, updating, and promotion of Community Charters. 46.8% of respondents have an adopted Community Charter. The largest share of adopted Charters falls within 2020–2024 — 24.1%. Charters adopted before 2019 were noted by 9.6% of respondents, and in 2025 — by 3.2% (11 communities). Officials from 17 communities do not remember the date of the document's adoption. It can be stated that only the community Charters adopted in 2025 comply with the requirements of the Law of Ukraine No. 3703 'On Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government' and include the entire list of public participation instruments defined by the Law. All other communities need to adopt a Charter or update existing ones in accordance with legislation by the end of 2026.
14. The Law on Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government, which entered into force at the beginning of 2025, equated the rights of IDPs with the rights of permanent residents in terms of participation in resolving issues of local importance. At the same time, 50% of respondents noted that IDPs are included in the composition of residents in accordance with the provisions of the Charter. However, in 2025, Charters were adopted in only 11 (3.2%) communities, meaning that precisely they could formally reflect and implement the requirements of the law in the charter provisions. In this regard, justified doubts arise concerning the reliability of the statement that the rights of IDPs are already actually regulated and ensured in 50% of communities.
15. 42.2% of respondents consider the introduction of chatbots or mobile applications for complaints and suggestions a priority, which indicates a demand for rapid communication with residents. 38.1% of officials emphasised the need to create an electronic portal of local self-government services, and 32.6% — an electronic platform for public consultations. At the same time, 33.1% of respondents indicated the need for electronic document management, which highlights problems with internal processes. In general, the most in-demand are instruments of rapid communication and service portals. The survey results confirm the need for comprehensive digitalisation, which covers both interaction with residents and administrative procedures.
16. Local self-government bodies highlighted the following successful examples of informing and engaging citizens that were applied during martial law, in particular: informing through official websites and social media, online consultations, electronic petitions, the participatory budget, as well as engaging residents in volunteering activities and mutual assistance to those affected by Russia's military aggression. At the same time, most practices are focused on digital communication channels, which generally corresponds to the conditions of martial law, but is simultaneously problematic given the low level of digital awareness of residents of small and medium-sized communities, as indicated by officials in previous answers.

COMPARISON OF 2022 AND 2025 RESULTS BY SPECIFIC INDICATORS

The survey of local self-government officials makes it possible to analyse changes in specific indicators regarding resident engagement mechanisms and communication channels. A previous similar study was conducted by the PROSTO project in 2022. The new 2025 cross-section allows for the assessment of the dynamics of specific indicators, the identification of key changes in the use of resident engagement instruments, and an analysis of the extent to which digitalisation and adaptation to martial law conditions have influenced the form and content of interaction between the authorities and citizens.

Informing channels used by local self-government bodies for communication with residents



Official digital channels (local self-government bodies' websites and social media pages) maintain a dominant position and remain the primary informing channels. There is a general tendency towards a decrease in the use of 'traditional' communication channels — newspapers, television, local websites, and printed products.

There may be several reasons for this: A significant reduction in community budgets for information coverage of activities. As well as the shrinking of the newspaper market, especially the so-called 'raionkas' (district newspapers) in communities, due to economic factors. The influence of the general trend of digitalisation and the migration of the audience to social media should also be added.

The speed of digital channels is important in crisis conditions when there is a need for rapid notification, dissemination of security updates, or information about evacuation or humanitarian aid. As an illustration, one can mention numerous applications and channels regarding air raid alerts.

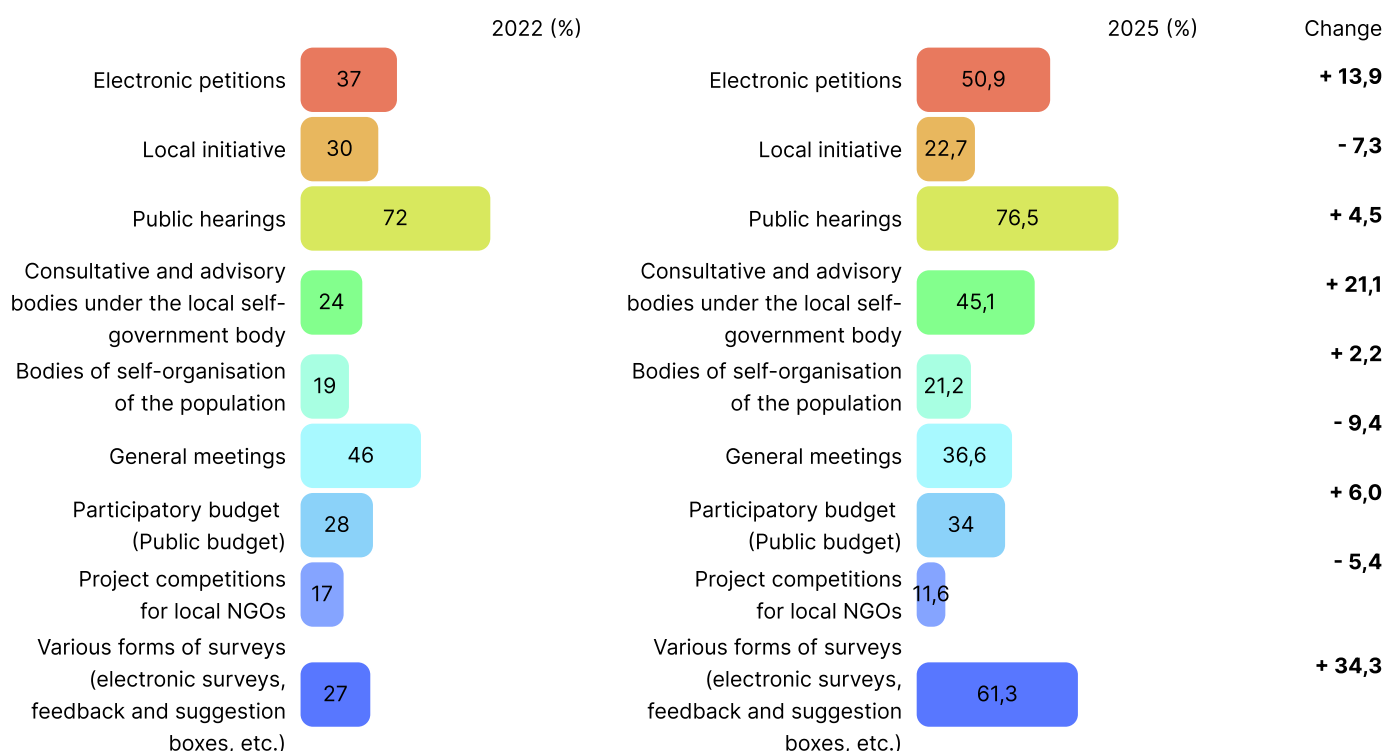
Therefore, digital informing channels certainly play a strategic role. Since the majority of residents have smartphones, they can quickly receive information via social media and messenger channels.

Local self-government bodies are trying to build direct communication with residents through official websites, social media, and electronic means of communication to be less dependent on external intermediaries — media or unofficial social networks. On the other hand, building good relationships with local media requires greater effort and professional skills from community communications officers. There is also a decline in the role of independent media as a platform for critical discussion and expressing an alternative view on community life.

The digitalisation of local self-government bodies' communication carries a risk of reducing inclusiveness in informing — part of the residents (older people, rural areas) may lose access to important information.

At the same time, a tendency towards an increase in the number of offline information events is noted, which may indicate a partial stabilisation of the security situation in rear-area communities. Having recovered from the shock of 2022, communities where possible are returning to meetings between officials and residents.

Resident engagement instruments used for making important decisions in territorial communities



The sphere of resident engagement has also undergone significant changes over several years, adapting and reacting to the security situation and the realities of martial law.

Over the three years, a tendency towards building hybrid forms of engagement and the use of digital instruments is reflected, and a demand for training the employees of local self-government bodies in informal methods of working with resident engagement is observed.

The greatest changes occurred in the use of various forms of **resident surveys** — their use increased more than twofold compared to 2022. The popularity of the instrument is due to the speed and simplicity of launching surveys, minimal financial costs, the influence of digitalisation, and the possibility of using various electronic platforms to obtain feedback from residents.

The significant growth of electronic surveys can also be linked to the local self-government bodies' need for consultations regarding reconstruction and development projects, renaming of streets, and changes to the school network, which are stipulated by legislation.

Electronic petitions also demonstrated significant growth dynamics, further highlighting the increased use of electronic means for resident engagement. Unfortunately, this instrument gained popularity in communities partly due to use related to petitions to the President of Ukraine regarding the awarding of defenders.

In 2025, compared to 2022, a substantial **increase in the use of consultative and advisory bodies under local self-government bodies** is observed (from 24% to 45.1%).

Advisory boards are intended to ensure regular dialogue and the formation of stable communication channels between the authorities and various groups of residents — internally displaced persons, veterans, youth, entrepreneurs, and representatives of the civic sector.

The growth in the role of consultative and advisory bodies is primarily linked to the creation of IDP councils in communities (unfortunately, this process was often initiated ‘from above’ and had formal characteristics). The creation of youth councils in communities is also one of the stages of implementing youth policy. Recently, a tendency towards creating veteran councils and councils for their family members has emerged.

Furthermore, the creation of CABs often meets the requirements of donor programmes and good governance approaches. This stimulates local self-government bodies to create various advisory bodies for participation in grant projects.

The **revival of the participatory budget** can be called the most positive trend of recent years. While after 2022 most communities abandoned this instrument, in 2025, a third of the communities that participated in the survey state that they use participatory budgeting in one way or another. This usually involves less funding compared to 2022; there may be specialised formats, such as school participatory budgets, or implementation occurs with the support or co-financing of donors.

The positive growth in the indicator for conducting public hearings should be treated with caution. Community officials often perceive any public discussion with residents as public hearings. At the same time, the Law ‘On Local Self-Government in Ukraine’ clearly defines the form of public hearings, and the procedure for conducting them must be reflected in the Community Charter.

The decrease in the use of such forms of participation as **general meetings and local initiatives** testifies to the difficulty of using these physical forms of participation under martial law, the low activity of residents in initiating and participating in offline events, and a reorientation towards instruments that are simpler to use.

Practice shows that under martial law and security restrictions, the forms of resident participation defined by legislation require adaptation and the development of relevant recommendations to enable them to be conducted in a mixed, hybrid format.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCAL LEVEL

1. Local councils of territorial communities, in compliance with the Law of Ukraine No. 3703-IX 'On Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government', should adopt or update community charters by 1 January 2027. Charters, in particular, should contain procedures regarding:
 - general meetings (conferences) of residents;
 - local initiatives;
 - public hearings;
 - public assessment of the activities of local self-government bodies;
 - the procedure for considering electronic petitions;
 - conducting public consultations.
2. Local councils of territorial communities should introduce changes to the council's rules of procedure (regulations), particularly regarding: publication of draft decisions and council decisions; publication of video recordings of council sessions and standing committee meetings; access of residents to council meetings; consideration of local initiatives; proposals and recommendations based on the results of the public assessment of the activities of local self-government bodies and officials; consideration of public hearing minutes and decisions of general meetings (conferences) of residents.
3. It is advisable for local self-government bodies to create a separate 'Public Participation' section on official websites, where information on the application and results of using public participation instruments (public hearings, public consultations, local initiatives, general meetings, public assessment, etc.) should be systematically published.
4. Local self-government bodies of territorial communities must ensure the possibility for internally displaced persons and community residents aged 14 and over to use forms of public participation when resolving issues of local importance. Introduce the practice of collecting data disaggregated by sex, age, social status, and place of residence (within the central settlement / outside of it) regarding resident engagement — with the aim of tracking progress in ensuring non-discriminatory and inclusive democracy.
5. It is advisable to create separate structural units (or designate responsible persons) within local self-government bodies to ensure the informing of residents and their engagement in the preparation and adoption of local decisions.
6. It is recommended to conduct educational events for community residents to disseminate knowledge about the procedure for using various forms of public participation and the norms of the territorial community charter. Special attention should be paid to training in the use of digital informing and participation instruments.

REGIONAL LEVEL

1. Oblast and raion councils, in compliance with the Law of Ukraine No. 3703-IX 'On Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government', should ensure the adoption of normative acts, in particular:
 - regulations on submitting a local initiative for consideration by the oblast/raion council;
 - regulations on the public assessment of the activities of local self-government bodies and officials of the oblast/raion council;

- regulations on conducting public consultations by the oblast/raion council;
 - the procedure for reporting by council members and local self-government officials of the oblast/raion council;
 - changes to the rules of procedure (regulations) of the oblast/raion council, particularly regarding: publication of draft decisions and council decisions; ensuring resident access to meetings; the procedure for considering local initiatives; consideration of proposals and recommendations based on the results of the public assessment of the activities of local self-government bodies and officials.
2. It is advisable for oblast and raion councils to create a separate 'Public Participation' section on official websites, where information on the application and results of using public participation instruments (public hearings, public consultations, local initiatives, general meetings, public assessment, etc.) should be systematically published.
 3. It is advisable for Oblast Military Administrations to organise training and information events for basic-level local self-government bodies regarding the development and adoption of territorial community charters, as well as the introduction of various forms of public participation and effective interaction with community residents.

NATIONAL LEVEL

1. Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine — to develop and provide local self-government bodies of all levels with methodological recommendations regarding the implementation of: the Law of Ukraine No. 3703-IX 'On Democracy at the Level of Local Self-Government', the Law of Ukraine No. 3841-IX 'On Public Consultations', and the Law of Ukraine No. 3590-IX 'On Ensuring the Transparency of Local Self-Government'.
2. Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine — to create and ensure access for local self-government bodies to the government electronic platform for conducting public consultations.
3. National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service — to expand the programme of training events for local self-government officials with the aim of increasing qualifications in the field of communication and engaging residents in decision-making.

