



**The State of Belarus' Society
Civic Literacy Test**

**National Survey Results
February**

2017

Introduction

Pact's priority activities in Belarus include supporting civic education programs aimed at raising civic awareness and promoting civic competencies and civic engagement.¹ To improve the quality and outreach of civic education programs in the country and to obtain relevant data² on Belarusians' level of civic awareness and citizen engagement, in June 2016, Pact commissioned a national survey from Belarusian marketing and technology firm, SATIO. This national survey was called the *Civic Literacy Test* and was the first of its kind in Belarus.

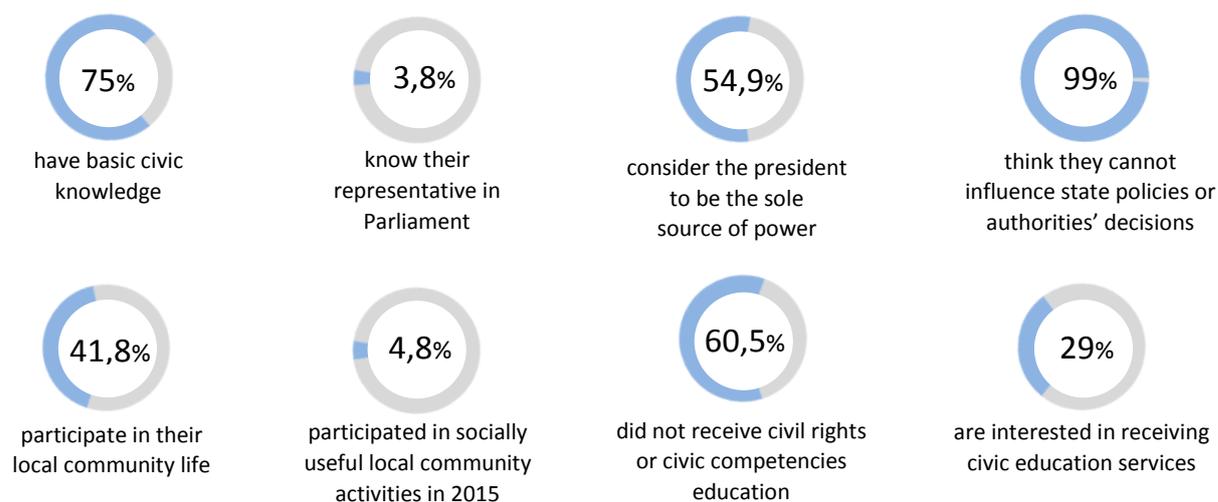
The findings are intended to help organizations plan and implement civic education programs, specifically to inform decisions regarding the content, forms, and methods of civic education interventions.

Survey Methodology

For the test's theoretical basis, Pact used the 21st Century Citizenship Concept,³ according to which modern people should possess certain knowledge and skills in order to be capable, effective, and responsible citizens of the global world. The Belarus survey targeted four main areas: civic knowledge, civic behavior, civic attitude, and civic education. Specifics on what the survey measured in each main area are provided at the beginning of each respective section in the survey results. These areas were studied according to the three pillars of the 21st Century Citizenship Concept: civic literacy, global citizenship, and digital citizenship.⁴

The survey met the required representation criteria (95% confidence interval with 3.1% sampling margin error) and combined quantitative (national polling) and qualitative methods (focus groups). The polling included 1,005 face-to-face interviews. Findings of the poll⁵ were reinforced with a series of 12 focus group discussions held in each regional capital of Belarus. This allowed for the discussion and interpretation of survey results and helped formulate and/or explain initial conclusions from the poll.

Key Findings



¹ See more on Pact's activities in Belarus at <http://www.pactworld.org/country/belarus>.

² Analysis of Civic Education Sector (Office for European Expertise and Communication, 2013; <http://oeec.by/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Анализ-сектора-гражданского-образования.pdf>) revealed a low level of civic knowledge and competencies among the Belarusians. It demonstrated that the real demand for civic education remained unknown.

³ http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/Reimagining_Citizenship_for_21st_Century_webversion.pdf

⁴ Following the Belarus survey, Pact partnered with UNDP Ukraine to expand the Civic Literacy Test idea to the regional level. UNDP Ukraine adjusted the test methodology and commissioned similar surveys in Ukraine and Moldova in July to September 2016.

⁵ Complete polling results are available at http://www.pactworld.org/sites/default/files/Tables_Civic_Literacy_Test.pdf

Belarusians possess basic civic knowledge. The majority (75.0%) of respondents demonstrated knowledge of national symbols, the country's administrative structure, and basic civil rights and responsibilities stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus by correctly answering corresponding questions of the survey.

The citizens of Belarus generally do not know who represents them in the legislative branch of the government. Only 3.8% and 3.0% of those interviewed indicated their ability to name the delegate representing their constituency in the national Parliament and in local councils, respectively.

An absolute majority (99.0%) of Belarusians believe they cannot influence state policies and decisions on both local and national levels.

Belarusians are prepared to show civic activism if the issues in question relate to them personally or their immediate circle. 66.5% of respondents declared their readiness to act jointly with their neighbors, and 41.8% are involved in their local community life, including tenant meetings and activities to improve their house or yard. At the same time, only 4.8% of respondents stated that they participated in socially useful activities (in 2015) organized by citizens in their places of residence. 18.6% of those surveyed indicated their involvement in volunteer activities

Belarusians' engagement in the global context is rather weak. 69.0% of respondents stated that they travel abroad, but not more than once per year. 9.3% had the experience of extended stay (more than six months) abroad. 61.0% indicated that they did not speak a foreign language. Whereas roughly 80% of respondents indicate that they are interested, to one or another degree, in regional and global news, less than 30% consider such developments as migration crisis in Europe or global warming important. 72.4% of Belarusians do not believe their every-day behavior can influence what is happening in other countries; 75% have never participated in regional or global events/actions.

There is a discrepancy between personal values and values that are considered characteristics of Belarusian society as a whole. Whereas tolerance was identified as an important personal value by only 5.9% of respondents, 32.0% of those surveyed believed it to be an inherent value of the Belarusians in general. Focus group participants explained such mismatch by the media, social environment, and politicians that mold the collective image of the Belarusian nation, which may not correspond to the Belarusians' self-perception or to the values that are important to each person individually.

The majority of Belarusians have no experience in participating in civic education programs. 60.5% of respondents did not attend any thematic lectures or educational programs and did not undergo independent training on civil rights or civic competencies. 58.8% of Belarusians expressed no interest in receiving such trainings in the future, whereas 29.0% of survey participants would like to receive civic education services. Most demanded other educational topics, including human rights, business, and foreign languages.

Belarusians often demonstrate deeper knowledge, greater activism, and positive attitudes when it comes to issues that affect them personally, as opposed to matters of common concern or public sphere. This conclusion is supported by respondents' answers to questions concerning civic participation, values, fiscal literacy, and the possibility to influence state policies.

Survey Results

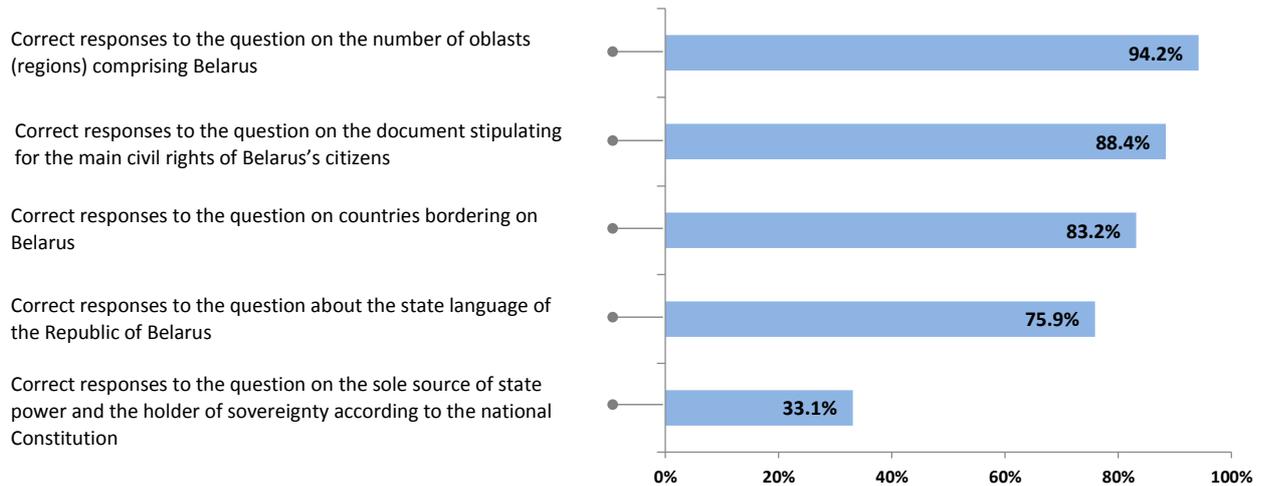
Civic Knowledge

According to the 21st Century Citizenship Concept, in order to be an effective and responsible citizen of a country, an individual should possess a certain basic set of civic knowledge and competencies. To check the level of civic literacy, the respondents were asked a series of questions to test their understanding of Belarus' administrative, political, and economic systems, including questions on state symbols, administrative structures, and basic principles of interaction between the state and citizens.

Basic civic knowledge

75.0% of Belarusians possessed basic civic knowledge of the administrative system, state symbols, and basic civil rights and responsibilities (Diagram 1). At the same time, the majority of respondents incorrectly answered the question regarding the sole source of state power and the holder of sovereignty according to the Constitution of Belarus: **55.0%** of those surveyed considered it to be the president and **33.1%** the people, the latter being the correct answer. Focus group participants attributed that to the fact that, perhaps, while answering the question the respondents were guided by their personal understanding of the real state of affairs, rather than the provisions of the national Constitution. An additional explanation was that the majority of Belarusians do not feel that they have the ability to influence what is happening in the country.

Diagram 1. Percentage of correct answers to questions checking basic civic knowledge



Awareness of elected representatives

To determine the level of citizen knowledge of their representatives that are elected to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus and to local legislatures, respondents were asked a series of open and closed questions. **69.0%** of those surveyed could not name their elected representatives, while **19.0%** found it difficult or refused to answer the question. Only **3.8%** and **3.0%** of respondents stated that they could confidently provide the name of a Member of Parliament representing their electoral district in the Parliament and in a respective Local Council, respectively.

Focus group participants noted that the lack of citizens' awareness was the result of poor coverage of legislators' work in the media. While discussing this issue, focus group participants referred to poor legislators' commitment to addressing voter concerns and to a low level of accountability.

National budget and income tax

23.5% of Belarusians believe they are well informed on how the state budget is formed and spent.

Awareness of the income tax rate for individuals is higher: **65.3%** responded correctly. Focus group participants explained the discrepancy by suggesting that the question on income tax rate was more familiar and clearer to poll participants because employed citizens receive monthly pay slips containing information about various deductions, including income tax. Questions related to the state budget most likely appeared more complex and less tangible and interesting to citizens because they lack accessible and straightforward relevant information.

Civic Behavior

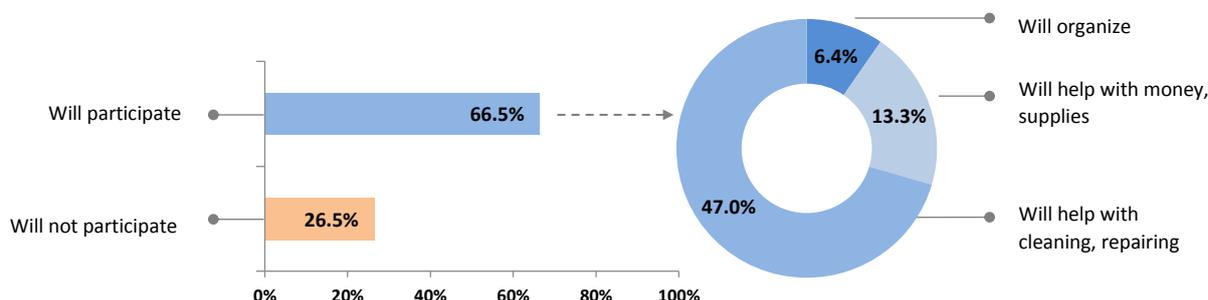
This section of the Civic Literary Test attempted to analyze civic behavior broken down into three categories: local-level civic engagement, practices of interaction with the state, and citizens’ involvement in the global context. To determine the level of civic activism, the respondents were asked a series of questions about their experience of participating in socially useful activities, voluntary work, and willingness to take part in local initiatives. The set of questions concerning interaction with the state aimed to identify the extent to which citizens consider themselves capable of influencing state policy and the work of national and local government. The final part of the section was devoted to civic behavior in the global context and included questions on respondents’ knowledge of foreign languages, purpose and frequency of their travel abroad, experience of extended stay in foreign countries, and desire to emigrate.

Participation of citizens in socially useful activities and local community life

The survey showed that only **4.8%** of Belarusians took part in socially useful activities organized by citizens in places of their residence (explicitly excluding state-organized *subbotniks*, which are specially designated days of non-paid work in the community). The questions on civic behavior also aimed to assess the level of volunteer engagement. According to the data, **76.0%** of Belarusians had never volunteered. Of the **18.6%** of respondents who have volunteering experience, only **4.1%** have done it frequently. The subsequent focus groups explained this low level as a result of Belarusians’ lack of time and interest, doubts as to the possibility of organizing joint action, and confidence in their limited influence on what is happening in the country.

The rate of potential and actual local-level civic engagement was higher: Belarusians are willing to be active in addressing issues affecting them, their families, and/or their immediate circle. **41.8%** of Belarusians did participate in their local community life, including attending tenant/homeowner association meetings, participating in territory beautification and landscaping activities, planning joint actions with neighbors, collecting signatures, and supporting the capacity of organizers of other community-based activities. Respondents were offered a scenario where apartment house residents were unhappy with the state of adjacent territory and were planning to improve it. **66.5%** of respondents stated their willingness to participate in such a territory-improvement civic initiative in one of another way (Diagram 2).

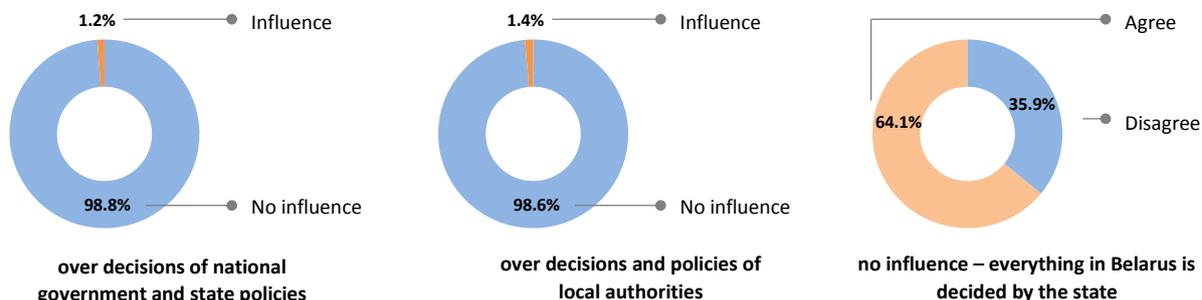
Diagram 2. Level of citizens’ readiness to participate in joint activities to improve shared territory around their apartment building (example scenario)



Interaction with the state

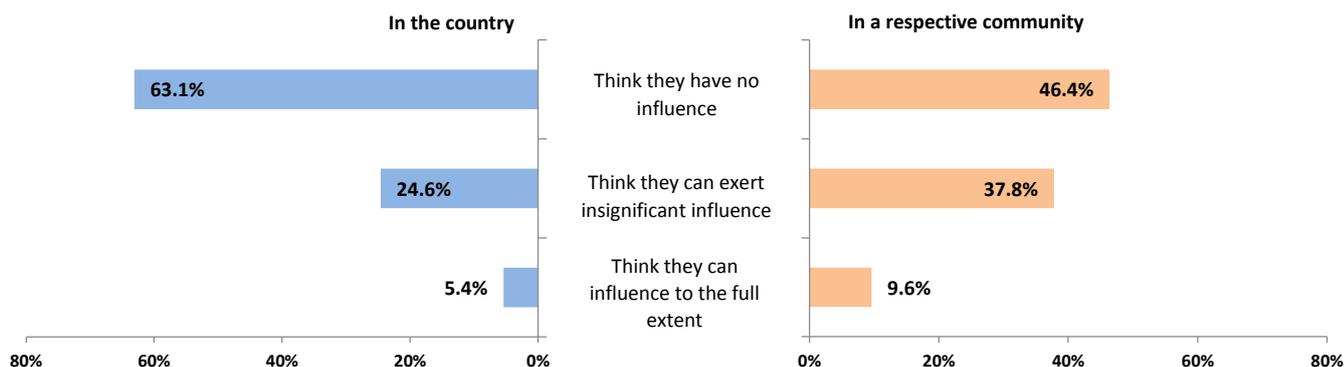
Based on the survey, **99.0%** of respondents believed they could not influence national or local government decisions or state policies (Diagram 3). The majority of respondents (**64.0%**) believed that the state decides everything in all spheres of life.

Diagram 3. Influence of personal choice and citizen behavior



The respondents also were asked to rate the extent to which they can influence the situation in their communities and in the country (Diagram 4). According to survey results, the citizens have more opportunities to influence local-level processes than those on the national level. More than half of respondents (**63.1%**) believed they could not influence the situation in the country in any way, and **24.6%** believed they could to a minor extent. However, almost **10.0%** of those surveyed believed they could fully influence the situation in their community, **37.8%** believed they could exercise insignificant influence, and **46.4%** believed that they had no influence whatsoever.

Diagram 4. Citizens' opinions on the extent to which they can influence the situation in the country and locally

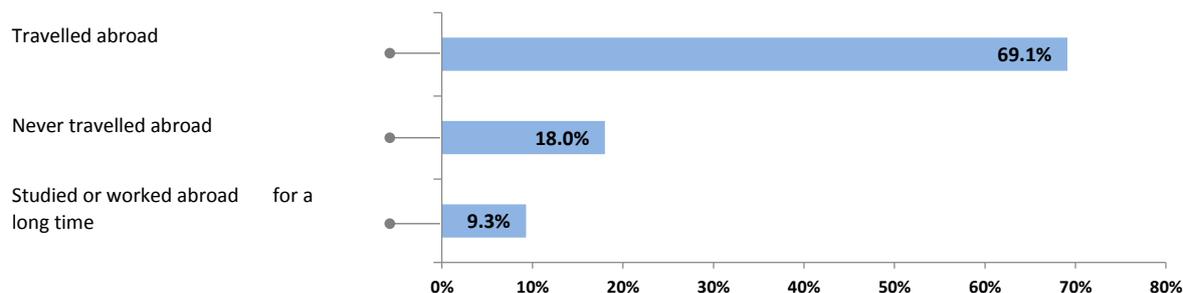


Civic behavior in the global context

A citizen's involvement in the global context and his/her ability to navigate the processes taking place internationally, including interaction with the representatives of other cultures and nations, manifests one of the important elements of the 21st Century Citizenship Concept. According to survey results, **61.0%** of respondents are unable to speak or understand any foreign language (a language other than Belarusian and/or Russian). The survey also showed that **18.0%** of respondents never traveled outside the country. **69.1%** of respondents do travel abroad, though they only travel once per year. Leisure (**50.7%**), visiting relatives or friends (**35.8%**), and shopping (**27.1%**) were listed among the most frequent purposes of foreign travel. Only **9.3%** of those who travel abroad had the experience of extended stay (more than six months) in a foreign country (See Diagram 5). According to the survey, less than **22.0%** of respondents would like to emigrate from Belarus. This group mainly consisted of citizens who travel abroad regularly,

stating their desire to improve their financial wellbeing as the main reason for potential emigration.

Diagram 5. Respondents' foreign travel experience



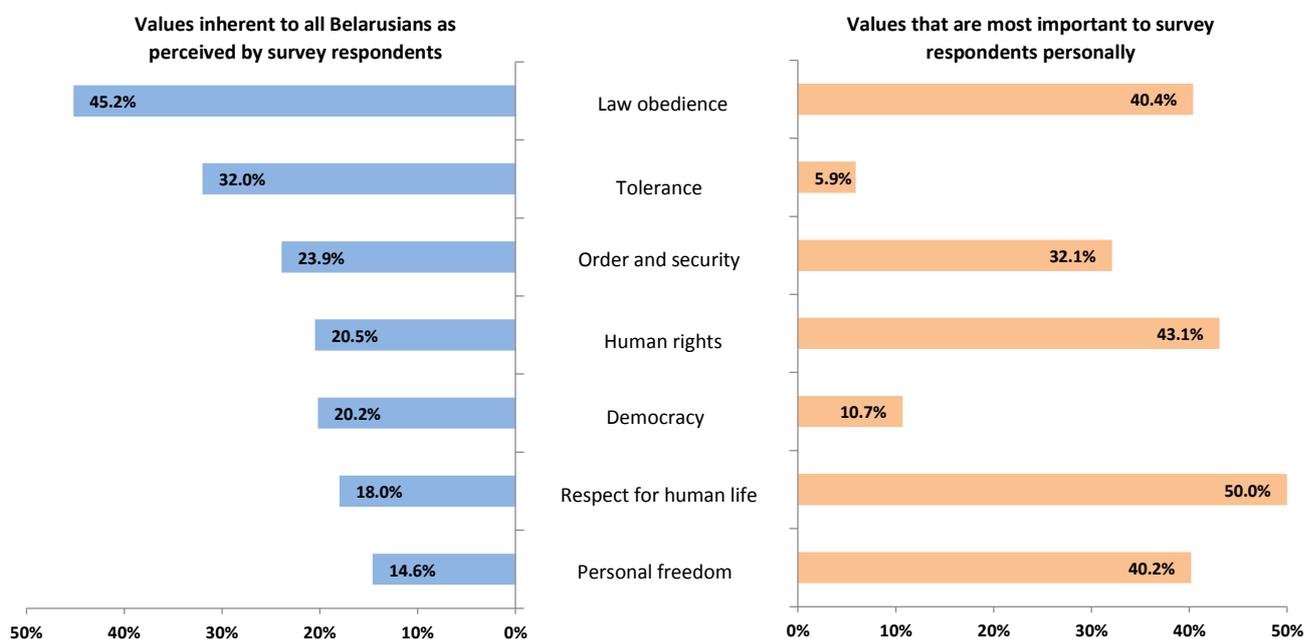
Civic Attitudes

This section of the Civic Literacy Test was dedicated to the values and attitudes which, to a large extent, govern a citizen’s behavior, determine the level of his/her activism, and explain how a citizen perceives his/her rights and responsibilities, society at large, and the practices accepted within a given society. This section dwells on the values inherent to Belarusians in general and those important for individuals. Analysis here also touches on the attitude of Belarusians toward foreigners who come to Belarus for a long period of time or live in Belarus as permanent residents.

Civic values

Survey respondents were offered a list of values depending on what was personally important to each of them: respondents could choose several options or, if they felt the list was incomplete, could add their own options. The key personal values were respect for human life (50.0%), human rights (43.1%), law obedience (40.4%), and personal freedom (40.2%). An identical list was presented to the respondents to choose the values that, in their opinion, were generally inherent to all Belarusians. The key personal values for all Belarusians were perceived as law obedience (45.2%), tolerance (32.0%), order and security (23.9%), and human rights (20.5%). (See Diagram 6.)

Diagram 6. Values perceived as inherent to all Belarusians in general and those of personal significance to survey respondents

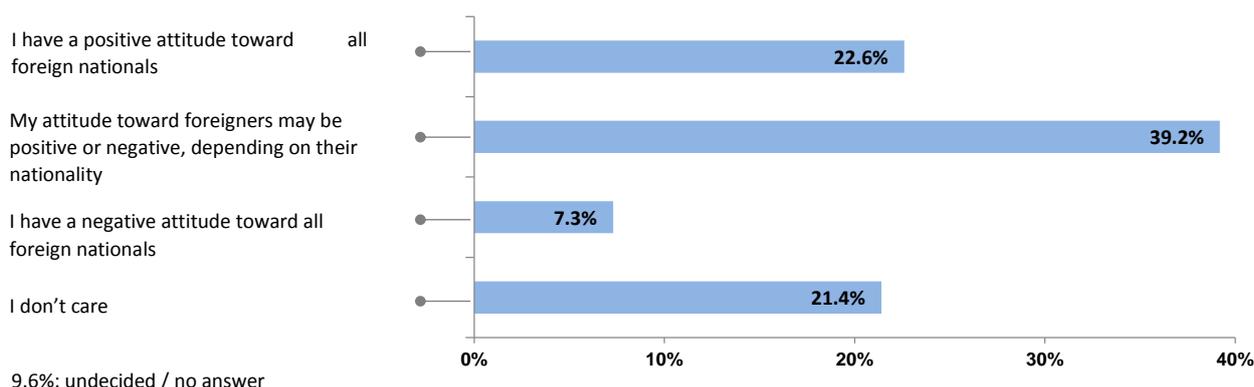


According to the focus groups, the media, politicians, and social institutions communicate stereotypical opinions regarding collective Belarusian characteristics that may not match their self-perception. Survey findings demonstrate this by demonstrating that out of the **32.0%** of survey respondents who referred to tolerance as a distinctive feature of all Belarusians, **23.2%** considered it unacceptable to live close to LGBT individuals, **11.0%** to immigrants, and **10.9%** to foreign workers.

Attitude toward foreigners

Respondents were asked to assess their attitudes toward foreign nationals who come to Belarus for a long period of time or have permanent residence status (Diagram 7). **39.2%** of those surveyed had positive or negative attitudes toward legal aliens depending on their nationality. And, only **22.6%** had positive views of all foreign nationals residing in Belarus or coming here for a long time.

Diagram 7. Attitudes toward foreigners who come to Belarus for a long time or who have permanent residence status



Civic Education

This section of the Civic Literary Test aimed to assess the demand for civic education and to study the extent to which training on specific civic competencies is relevant to citizens (see Diagram 8).

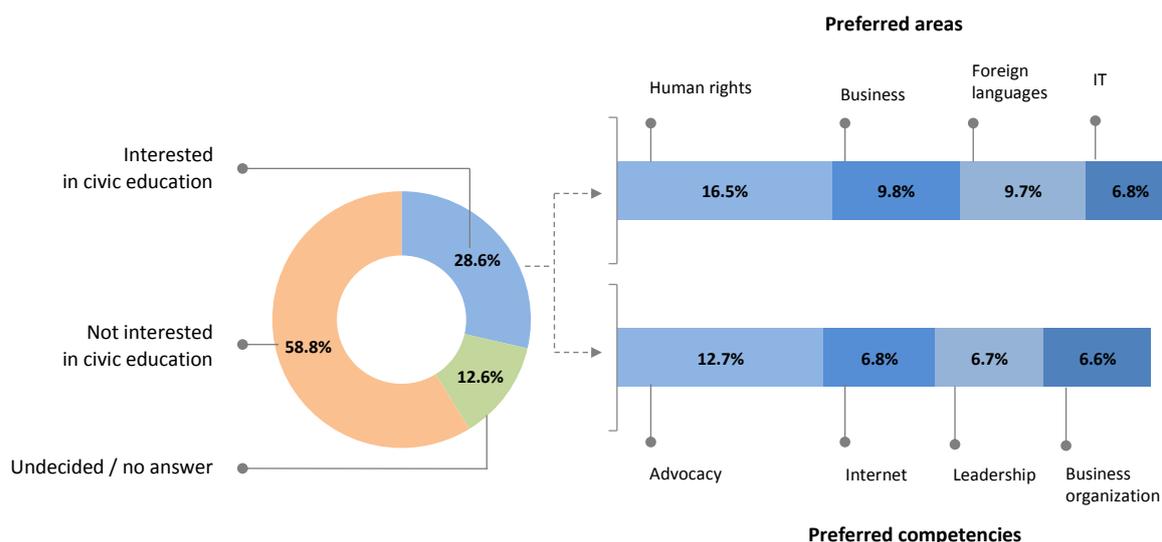
Training on civic rights and competencies

The survey showed that **27.0%** of respondents received civil rights and skills training either independently or within the framework of special educational programs. **60.5%** indicated lack of such experience. The group of respondents who wanted to engage in civic education and receive corresponding services represents **28.6%** of the total number of those surveyed.

Most in-demand areas and practical skills

Survey respondents who expressed interest in civic education identified the following areas of particular interest (respondents could choose up to three options): human rights (**16.5%**), business and entrepreneurship (**9.8%**), and foreign languages (**9.7%**). The most in-demand practical skills respondents wanted to learn (respondents could choose up to three options) were protecting their personal rights and interests (**12.7%**); using digital technologies, the internet, and social networking (**6.8%**); developing leadership skills (**6.7%**); and developing competencies necessary to set up/run a personal business (**6.6%**). Stationary courses were identified as the most preferred form of training (**14.7%**), and distance learning rendered slightly less popular (**10.7%**).

Diagram 8. Demand for civic education



Providers of civic education services

The most popular sources of civic education included state educational programs (11.5%) and self-education (7.5%). Educational programs provided by non-governmental organizations/foundations (6.2%), private education programs (5.3%), and trainings abroad (3.6%) were less in demand.

Focus group discussions of these questions showed equally high levels of distrust toward civic education services provided by state and non-state organizations. Focus group participants explained the importance of ideological neutrality, freedom from political bias, and professional expertise of civic education providers — characteristics which, in their opinion, both government and non-government actors lack.

Demographics of those interested in civic education

Respondents interested in civic education (28.6%) were city residents, people with higher education, and aged 18–29 years or 30–60 years. It is worth noting that about one half of all rural residents who participated in the survey (19.2% of the total number of survey participants) expressed interest in civic education.

Recommendations

Recommendations suggested below are intended for civic education providers and international organizations that invest resources in the development of civic education in Belarus. These recommendations are designed to help increase the quality and expand the outreach of civic education programs in the country.

Adjust the content of civic education based on the Civic Literacy Test results. Survey results suggest paying more attention to the substantive areas of civic education in which Belarusians demonstrate the least amount of knowledge and competencies. Such areas include the political system and functioning of central and local governments; functions and powers of different branches of government; economic and fiscal literacy; cross-cultural education; human rights and values; civic activism; and leadership.

Enrich civic education tools, forms, and methods, including widening the use of modern information and communication technologies to popularize civic education and increase its outreach. Because Belarusians prefer in-class forms of civic education over distance learning forms, civic education providers are encouraged to develop the infrastructure most appropriate to in-class learning. An alternative solution

could lie with creating greater demand for distance learning that uses online technologies and facilitates a habit of using such technologies among consumers of civic education services. Development of new technologies could create greater opportunities to engage new or underserved constituencies, increase outreach, and develop a variety of services, thus making civic education more accessible and relevant to citizens' needs.⁶

Introduce civic education elements into different civil society organizations' activities. Platforms to debate on issues of civic education and ad hoc events to exchange experiences and best practices are taking place in Belarus. Better regularity of such discussions with the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders would contribute to the promotion of and approaches to civic education. It also would facilitate mutual learning and introduce modern teaching standards and methods.

Evaluate the results of civic education programs. The effects of civic education programs are still understudied; this must be remedied in order to improve program quality. Customer surveys could be used as a tool to engage civic education recipients in the evaluation process.

Increase the amount and diversity of research in the field of civic education. Civic education providers should regularly study processes that take place in the field and analyze the general context that affects the formation of civic virtue. Research allows for a better understanding of factors that influence the development of the sector, such as trends and demand. Strengthening research and analytical activities then actively disseminating research findings would help introduce an evidence-based approach to planning civic education programs. This, in turn, could improve the relevance of civic education programs for beneficiaries.

Disseminate more and better information about the opportunities for and results of existing civic education programs. Accessibility of information about opportunities and results of civic education programs the availability of educational materials on issues where citizens lack knowledge play important roles in the promotion of civic education. Accessibility means that the necessary information on various resources is available, that the target constituency has the ability to receive it through the most convenient channels (e.g., television, social networks), and that this information is regularly updated, relevant, attractive, understandable, and trustworthy.⁷

⁶ For example, a YouTube channel and the use of distance learning technologies allows for stepping outside of the traditional classroom boundaries and for delivering material to hundreds or even thousands of people. Considering Belarusians' generally low interest in civic education, providers should build public demand by incorporating civic education elements into popular and entertaining formats and by introducing training methods that would be attractive and appealing to citizens' motivations and pragmatism.

⁷ Joint initiatives with the media have significant potential to strengthen the public awareness component of civic education programs. Awareness campaigns in the media could support wide public debate on issues of civic virtue and promote models of constructive civic behavior. They also could facilitate the formation of public opinion and fill the gap in civic knowledge.



pact

building
local
promise.

