

Vox  
Ukraine

Annual report  
—  
2020

# Foreword

2020 was by no means an ordinary year. It forced many people and organizations to 'reinvent' themselves and re-evaluate their priorities. Some things which seemed very important turned out to be just conventions, while those we took for granted (like cooler talks) suddenly became essential. Our organization was no exception. Many of my colleagues changed their habits – some of them for good. As a team, we were thinking a lot about what we do, why we do this and generally what the role and mission of think tanks in Ukraine is.

In the developed countries, think tanks are an organic part of the political and media landscape. They define policy alternatives and evaluate their costs and benefits for the entire society in the long run. Looking at their analysis, media know what to ask of politicians promoting certain policy, so that pros and cons of it become clear for everyone. Think tanks generate policy discussions and help align interests of different stakeholders. In some sense they perform a 'reality check' for the governments willing to change the 'rules of the game'. In this setting, it is nearly impossible to adopt a 'surprise' legislation. At the same time, an extensive discussion before adoption increases chances for successful implementation of a policy change.

In Ukraine, think tanks perform similar functions. They develop policy alternatives (or evaluate government policy proposals) and explain costs and benefits of these alternatives. Sometimes they provide expertise to the government or implement technical assistance projects of international organizations. By doing this, they help tie Ukraine to the international context. But there are two other things which in our view are even more important.

First, think tanks help people to be good citizens. An 'ideal' citizen would be the one who studies past performance and programs of candidates/parties before voting in elections; the one who reviews the budget of her community to find out whether community leadership is efficiently using taxes that she pays; the one who actively participates in public discussions of local or country-wide projects. In reality, however, the majority of people would rather devote their time to something more important for them – work, family, friends. This is where think tanks and media can help. They can analyze programs of candidates and present the results in a simple and concise form; review local and state budgets or investment projects, raise the 'red flags' and question the authorities on the use of taxpayers' money. Thus, a citizen can review a think tank report rather than dig into the lines of a budget or ToR of a project. In this way think tanks fit into the division of labour and help raise overall efficiency of the economy.

But perhaps the most important thing is that think tanks 'dream big'. They provide a vision for the country describing a state in which we would want to live. While "*politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best*", think tanks provide a picture of the 'first best'. In some sense, they are lighthouses for the ship-state.

So, what is our big dream? We want Ukraine to be a modern democratic country with functioning rules and institutions and a high level of human capital. We want to have an evidence-based policy discussion rather than an emotional debate. We want honest and responsible government and a high level of social trust.

To help this dream come true, we raise important issues, check the statements of politicians, help government agencies become institutionally stronger and promote economic literacy. We also implement policy research. In this report you will read what we did along these lines in 2020.







# VoxUkraine in numbers

218 original articles

15 digests and 20 translations on the pandemics

25 releases of Reform Index + 4 quarterly overviews

7 interviews

13 publications based on podcasts and discussions  
organized by VoxUkraine

8 exclusive book extracts

19 explainer videos

4 videos on healthcare reform

18 'Fake Hunter' videos

76 video-fact-checks

52 podcasts 'What about economics?' together with  
CES and Hromadske radio

Over 800 antifakes

Over 40 interns completed the internship programs

14 online and offline discussions (of them 9 with local media)

The number of readers of our web-site grew by 50%,  
the number of followers in social media – by 20%

# Topics

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2. Basic Concepts

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Several topics were in the focus of policy discussion on the pages of our web-site and at our events.

## Labour market

We started with the discussion of labour market statistics in February 2020, and then used the Jooble data to explore the mismatch between aspirations of would-be students and demands of employers. Later we looked at labour market developments during the quarantine (1, 2, 3). Not surprisingly, Covid-related lockdowns had a greater impact on women than on men. At some point Ukrainian people, especially poorer ones, became more worried about preserving their jobs than about saving their health. This can be seen not only in sociological surveys but also in the Google search entries.

Economic crisis caused by the pandemics

When the pandemics started, we published a series of articles on what can be done about the economic crisis caused by lockdowns. We argued that the government response to the crisis should be swift and big, countercyclical, it should target sectors and social groups with the highest multipliers, and that Ukrainian government should not consider non-conventional options such as QE or default since these would have severe adverse consequences for the country. In early March we warned Ukrainian government of the looming crisis and later signed an open letter of Ukrainian economists suggesting the anti-crisis policies for the new government. We also defined which households and industries would suffer most from the pandemic and thus needed special support. Later, we compared measures taken by the Ukrainian government to those of other countries. When the NBU governor resigned, we signed an open letter calling to preserve the NBU independence. We also warned about the danger of raising inflationary or devaluation expectations.

## Society

We discussed whether the crisis would spur the demand for expert government (as opposed to the populist trend observed since 2008-2009 crisis). Some of our authors answered positively to this question, some negatively, and others warned about risks of an 'expert' government. We also analysed e-petitions submitted to the parliament and government – the results were not pleasant for the Ukrainian society.

We looked at how religious people celebrate Easter during the pandemics (1, 2) and how Mariupolitans identify themselves (1, 2).

We also wrote an open letter aimed at preventing direct negotiations of Ukraine's representatives with so-called 'DPR' and 'LPR' in Minsk. 18 organizations and over 500 people signed the letter.

## Education

We pay a lot of attention to education since this is an essential foundation for a modern country. In 2020 we wrote about the gap between results of after-school testing (ZNO) of students from urban and rural areas, looked at how medical students passed the KROK exams, and studied how students from occupied territories enter Ukrainian universities

## State budget

We continue to closely monitor and discuss the public budget. In 2020 we held expert discussions of budget planning, anti-crisis spending, audit, and debt policy. We also updated the regular publication on the budget procedure implementation, on the attempts of MPs to expand the budget expenditures, and published regular budget overviews (1, 2). We explained the consequences of a sharp increase of the minimal salary, studied the results of four years of Prozorro.Sales, explained how the IMF money is spent, how much the subsidies cost, how government agencies manipulate their money and why the subvention on socio-economic development is highly politicized.







## Reforms

During 2020 we produced 25 regular bi-weekly iMoRe releases, four quarterly reform overviews and several articles focused on specific legislative issues. Thus we discussed ‘quarantine laws’ adopted by the parliament (1, 2, 3), the new procedure for the lease of state-owned and municipal property, refocusing of international broadcasting onto occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and changes of the electoral rules, the loss of construction statistics due to the change of construction approval procedure and the needed changes to the law on statistics to allow State Statistics Service to obtain administrative data and provide microdata to researchers.

We wrote several retrospective articles – the comparison of reform efforts of four post-Maidan governments, summary of the first year of the president from the reform perspective, and our regular rating of MPs’ efficiency after the second and third sessions. We also looked at how MPs write about land reform on their FB pages and found out which parties support it, which don’t and which try not to express a definite opinion.

We supported the continuation of healthcare reform and shot a number of videos on how the second stage of reform (specialized care) is being implemented (Zvenyhorodka, Sumy, Illintsi).

And of course we were outraged by the decision of the Constitutional Court which effectively cancelled the anti-corruption infrastructure in Ukraine.

## Media

During 2020 and into 2021 VoxUkraine has been developing the instrument for automatic media analysis. We published the first results of the analysis investigating what media write about politicians and about the pandemics, how leading online media cite each other, what are the most popular topics (and words) and how media write about these topics – in a positive, negative or neutral way.

At the end of 2020, the news archive contained over 1 million publications from over 40 online media. The media analysis tool will become publicly available in the mid-2021.

## Coronavirus

We could not stay away from discussions of the ‘topic of the year’ – the coronavirus. We wrote an explainer on R number (and recorded a respective video), explained the need to test more and how various governments trace contacts to prevent infections. We also implemented a joint project with Hromadske - Ukraine after the quarantine. This was a series of interviews/podcasts on what would change for good after the pandemics. It would be interesting to review these predictions in a year or so.

Generally our effort related to coronavirus was aimed at providing verified and reliable information on the pandemics to Ukrainian people. With this aim we launched a special landing page publishing verified news, digests (15), exclusive translations (20) of publications from Project Syndicate and some other sources.

To deliver the correct information to the most vulnerable, we partnered with Zhyttelub fund that supports elderly people. We helped it to compile two printed newspapers with the main facts about the coronavirus and things to do to reduce the probability of infection.

We also shot an explainer video for healthcare workers on how to put on and off protective clothing.







## Local elections

Topic of the year for Ukraine was local elections. We published a number of relevant articles – on the network of party offices, portraits of incumbent mayors, fact-check of mayors of Dnipro and Odessa, of Mayors of Lviv and Kharkiv. We also wrote about the organization of elections during the pandemics and how the parties coped with it.

Before the elections, VoxCheck checked the list of candidates of the ‘Democratic Sokyra’ party. Several other parties were interested in the same fact-check for the next elections. Hopefully more parties will adopt this merit-based approach to forming their party lists.

We organized two open events with Promote Ukraine – before and after the local elections. We also launched a special Telegram channel ‘Election Box’ where we posted interesting publications related to elections from Ukraine and other countries.



We developed social discussion not only on the pages of our blog but also live (although in most cases online).

During 2020 we organized already mentioned 4 discussions on the state budget, presentation of MPs' efficiency rating, discussion on good governance, and Zoom meetings together with local media on various issues of local interest (e.g. local elections, urban planning, traffic in cities etc).

On December 3rd we organized a joint event with Ukrainian Institute of America and Taras Shevchenko Community in the US. We discussed the impact of Covid pandemics on Ukrainian economy.

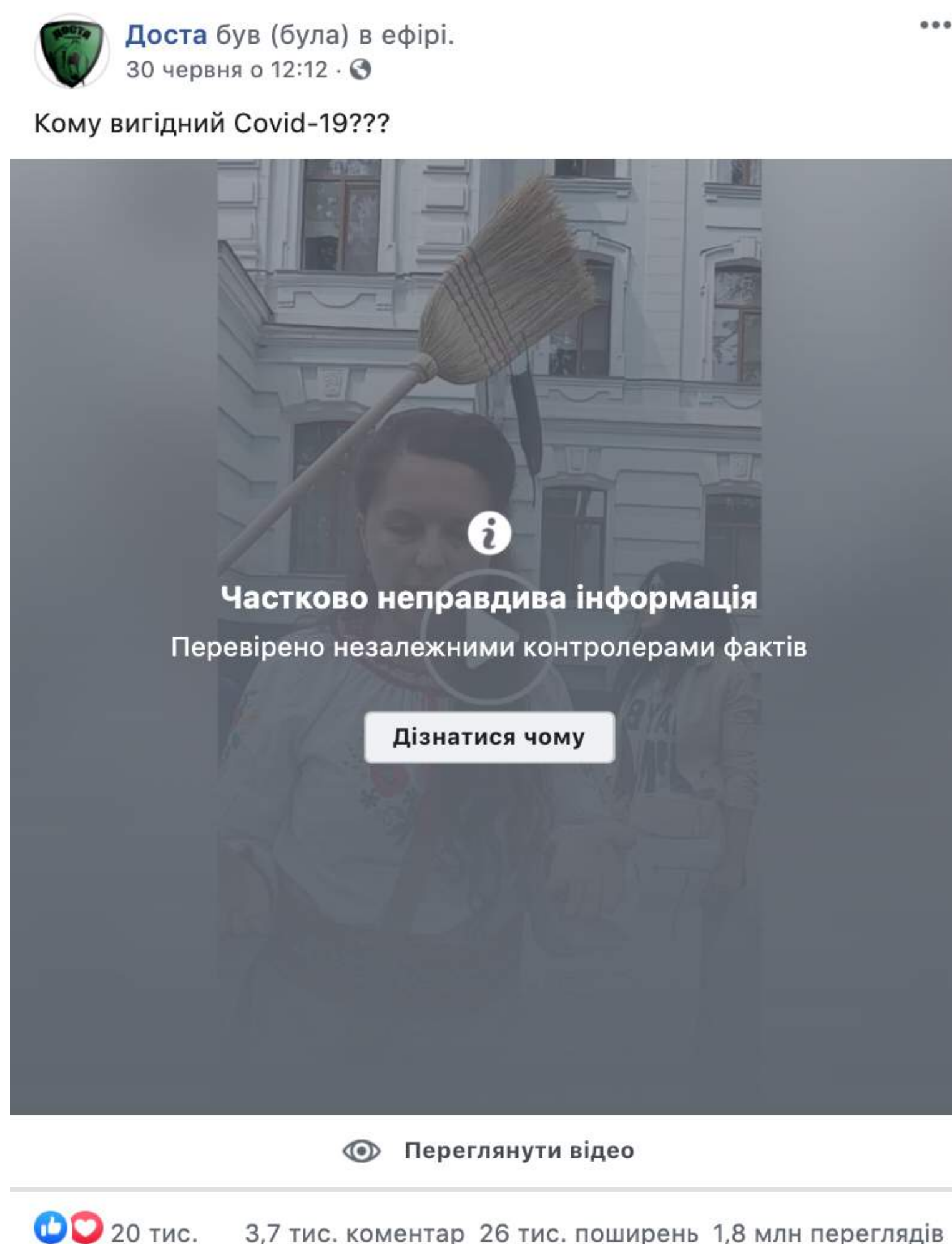
We participated and organized one panel in the IX Civil Society Forum.

We also took part in a number of discussions (1, 2, 3) related to the freedom of speech and counteracting disinformation.

We continued to debunk fakes and lies of politicians

We issued a regular 'Rating of Liars', recorded 18 episodes of 'Fake Hunter' aired on Suspilne TV, provided fact-checks for Yanina Sokolova show 'Soromno' and continued live fact-check of politicians in the 'Countdown' show on Suspline.

In March 2020 VoxCheck signed a contract with Facebook to become a third-party factchecker for Ukraine along with StopFake. Since then, VoxCheck team has been reviewing fakes posted on FB and blocking them with a special FB instrument. VoxCheck was the first representative from Ukraine in the IFCN #CoronaVirusFactsAlliance initiative and the only one submitting fakes to the Alliance database (during 2020, we added more than 100 coronavirus fakes to the database).





## Teaching and mentoring

During summer-fall 2020 we had almost 40 interns with fact-check and several interns with other projects. Interns help us a lot, and at the same time they get intensive training in data analysis, writing and critical thinking. For the summer internship the competition was three people per place.

During 2020, VoxCheck delivered 31 lectures and trainings, participated in 10 public discussions and two international conferences. We talked to different audiences – Medical High School students, students and journalists invited to the NBU 'Economic Express' workshop, children from the School of Success of Klitschko Foundation, students of National Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and others.

## Institutional development

Last year, we worked closely with State Statistical Agency helping them to draft communication strategy and plan, and generally to become more user-friendly. If you signed up for the Derzstat newsletter, run into the simple [explanations](#) of the most commonly used statistical indicators or the [dashboard](#) of the progress on achieving Sustainable Development Goals – you can appreciate our work. You may have also visited the online events dedicated to the introduction of register-based census which we helped organize.

Together with the Centre for Journalism at KSE we organized a number of lectures for public officials on how to communicate with the media (1, 2, 3). The lectures were published on VoxUkraine web-site and as a brochure delivered to government agencies.

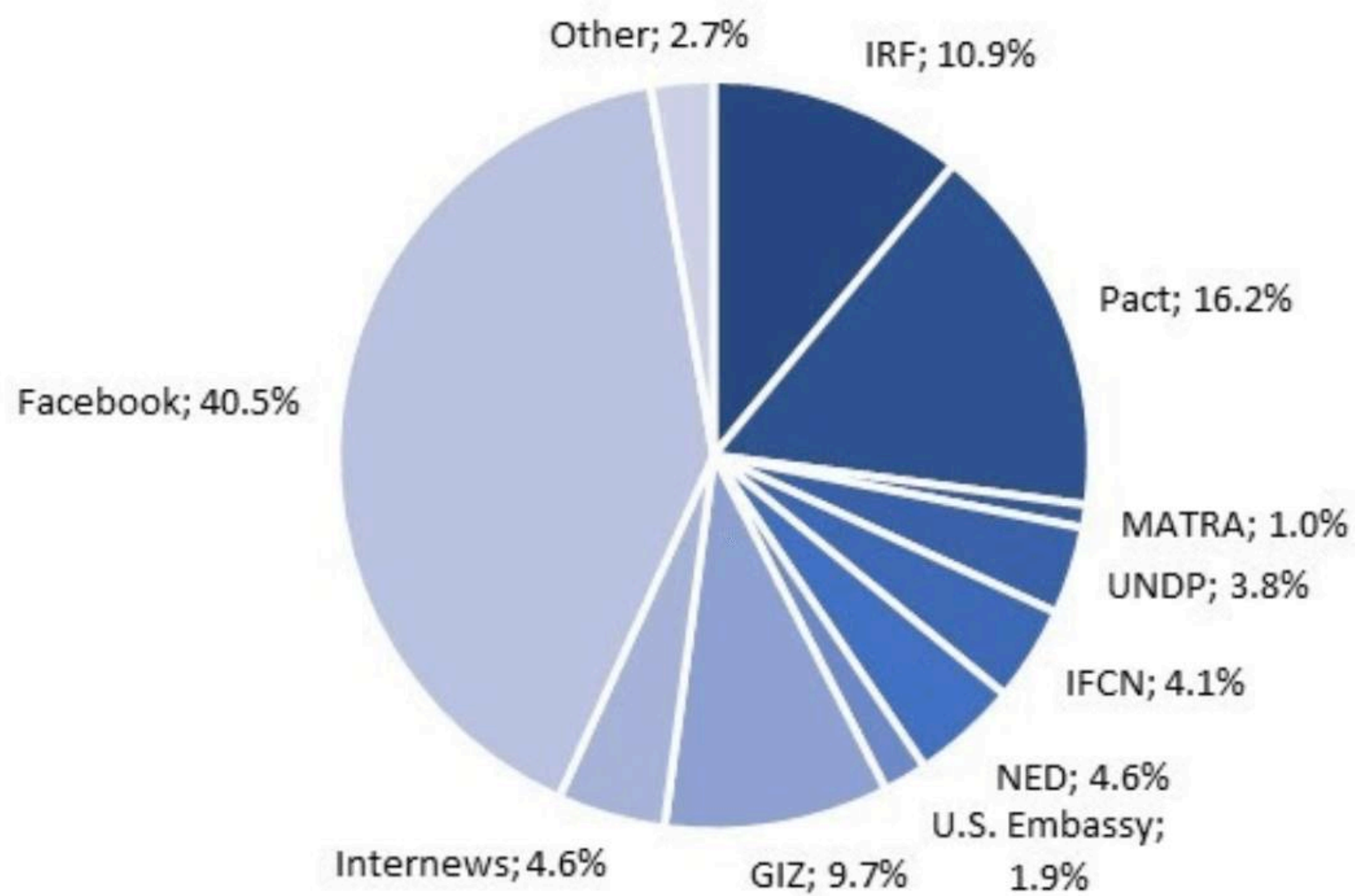




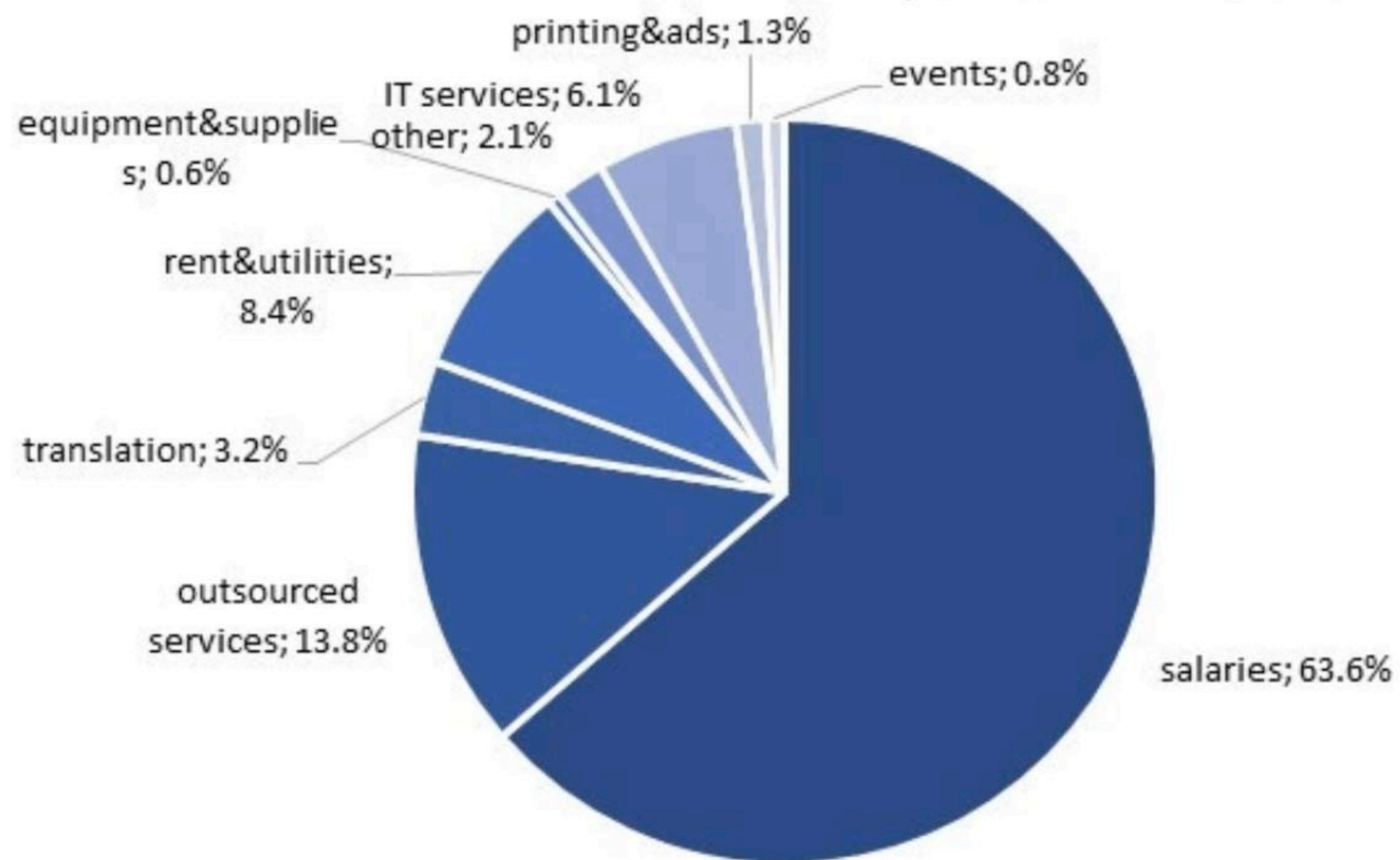
# Financial report



## Revenues, UAH 25.5 mln



## Expenditures, UAH 14.6 mln





All of the above would not be possible without our donors. Our special gratitude goes to about 100 people who supported us via the web-page despite the economic crisis and despite us not implementing an active crowdfunding campaign. It is important for us to know that we are useful for you!

