

VoxUkraine
Annual report 2019

Introduction

There is a legend. An ancient Greek philosopher while walking along the seashore with his students, drew two circles on the sand and said: "Let the sand on this shore be all unknown in the world. A small circle is your knowledge. The large circle is my knowledge. You see that many more sand grains touch my circle than yours."

Today, humanity knows and learns every minute much more than a few decades ago. Thus, as the amount of knowledge we need to cover at least superficially increases exponentially so does the volume of the unknown that we encounter.

Perhaps the famous "goldfish effect" (that is, the rapid forgetting of the new information) is a protective reaction to the enormous amount of information and even greater volume of the unknown. And perhaps it is a natural protection against an avalanche of emotional messages, not all of which are true or relevant to our lives.

So the paradox is that although we will live longer than all the generations who have lived before, we will learn longer and retire later, our memory becomes shorter. Planning horizons are also shorter – due to the greater volume of the unknown and greater uncertainty.

Indeed, knowledge and skills become obsolete very fast, and it is unclear which of them will be needed tomorrow. However, new knowledge or technology is predominantly based on existing ones. New research much more often complements previous research than refutes it. The knowledge and experience once acquired may unexpectedly come in handy when they seem to have lost their relevance. So how to preserve memory and extend planning horizon in a seemingly chaotic world of "everything is possible"? In my opinion, the answer is institutions, both formal and informal. Three of them seem to me the most important.

The first is reputation. It is the basis of public trust. A reputation cannot be built in one day. We create it every day when we are guided by values and take steps to achieve a superior goal. We support the reputation when we tell the truth, do the right things, and don't deal with people who have done wrong. At the same time everyone has the right for a mistake and forgiveness.

The second one is professionalism. It starts with a quality education and embeds many years of effort to study a particular area in depth. A professional accepts new knowledge but validates it with scientifically proven facts. A professional does not provide simple answers, but can explain his/her reasoning in a simple way.

The third institution is dialogue. Unlike debate, dialogue is not based on emotions, the beauty of argument or convincing. The dialogue is first and foremost the ability to listen, respect for the opponent and the desire to understand another opinion. However, in order for the dialogue to take place, both sides must show these features. The dialogue is not possible with people who have an adverse reputation or do not respect professionalism.

In our society, dialogue is poorly developed. VoxUkraine tries to support it by attracting professionals with impeccable reputation. And we are very grateful to everyone who helps us and supports us.

What we were doing during 2019

We discussed important things:

- Economic growth, exports and support of domestic producers, as well as the unusual for our country phenomenon - the strengthening of the hryvnia.
- Society. We learned why Ukrainians do not like capitalism, why reforms seem to be endless, how distrust slows progress, and why it is difficult to change the judiciary system, who is happiest in Ukraine and why we do not pay taxes. We also discussed how many of us stayed in Ukraine and how to count us correctly (and no, 0.88 it is not a census).
- The land market, including its impact on the economy and earnings of farmers.
- The Donbas war and the international debate around it.
- Decentralization - the essence of reform, its popularity, the optimal size of communities - and related constitutional reform.
- Electoral code and political system, political short-sightedness of governments and, of course, elections (including programs of political parties, distrust to the parliament, historical portrait of the Verkhovna Rada, expectations of the next president).

We supported medical reform, both by open letter and by refuting myths, explaining patterns of funding for medicine in different countries, emergency care reform and the next steps of medical reform. We also found anomalies in medical student test scores and thoroughly explored medical education.

We monitored the turmoil around the State Budget - considered the budget "wishes" of MPs, the risks of the budget and its implementation, spending on local development and compliance with the budgetary procedure.

We also saw how photos can change the law.

We researched:

- Political preferences of Ukrainians and voters' similarity.
- Media space and social networks, including media space "about & around politics", favorite topics of local media, bots on politicians' FB pages and on mass media FB pages.
- (not too) explicit trade of land, new businesses openings, and civil service reform
- the effectiveness of MPs in supporting reforms (1, 2, 3) and their transitions between factions.

In 2019, we delved into data analysis and began exploring Ukraine's media space through natural language software. Other companies have helped us in this. For example, in a regional media study with Semantic Force, we used a vocabulary-based inductive method (PLSA). While researching the land market via OLX ads, we learned not only where and how many land plots are sold in Ukraine, but also how to work with natural language text with a bunch of errors and misprints. Thanks to Opendatabot data, we were able to find out how many new businesses are opening in Ukraine every day and what are the most popular business areas.

Together with Artelligence, the developer of the bot definition algorithm, we investigated the behavior of fake accounts on Facebook on the eve of parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as on FB media pages.

At the end of the year we started a joint project with the American company [CrowdTangle](#). Through this collaboration, we have access to information on all public Facebook pages. The results of the study will be published shortly.

We continued to follow reforms

For five years already, VoxUkraine and about 40 [volunteer experts](#) have not only been following the reforms, but are evaluating each reform law or regulation. Since the beginning of 2015, we have evaluated 922 pieces of legislation in 125 issues of the Index for Monitoring of Reforms.

In 2019, we launched a new section - "iMoRe Focus", which covered in more details [the connection to electricity grids](#), [currency liberalization](#), problems of state [mines](#), industrial [visa-free regime](#) and [civil service](#) reform. We also evaluated the [implementation](#) of anti-corruption reforms.

So, if you want to know what a new law or regulation really changes but don't have time to study the document - visit [this page](#). An overview of the reforms over the past five years can be found in [White Book on Reforms](#) our joint project with the Kiev School of Economics.

As part of a joint project with the Cambridge Society for Social and Economic Development, we conducted a [study](#) "Assessing the Impact of Directorates on the Quality of Governmental Decisions in Ukraine" and found out what practices have brought the newly created Directorates into the ministries.

iMoRe data underlie the [KPI of MP's](#) tool, which is updated after each session of the Verkhovna Rada. In 2019, we updated the design of the tool and improved the algorithm for collecting voting data.

We have had some offline discussions about the reforms - we have discussed [directorates](#) and civil servants [evaluation](#), as well as [census](#) methods.

[Ministers](#) and [government agencies](#) are referring to the VoxUkraine's Index for Monitoring of Reform, and the overview of the reforms for the 4th quarter of 2019 even made it into [German media](#).

We checked facts and refuted fakes

Since the beginning of 2016, VoxCheck has been reviewing politicians' statements and explaining why they lied or manipulated. Since 2018, we are the members of the International Fact-Checking Network and [signatories](#) of the international fact-checker community charter. In 2019, we've passed the IFCN audit again.

Over 2019, we have checked over 700 quotes from politicians and experts. All the "findings" are collected in the [Anthology of Lie](#) database (that now contains over 3000 statements) so anyone can easily find and check a speeches of politicians and opinion leaders (and it should be noted that they do not update the "repertoire" too often). We also created [the fact-checking tool page](#) that will help the beginner fact-checkers.

We have identified and described the [top 5 myths](#) about Ukraine and the EU and looked at whether there are [similar](#) myths in Georgia and Moldova (spoiler: yes).

But fact-checking is not all. In 2019, we conducted 35 workshops, trainings and lectures, participated in more than 50 broadcasts on television and radio.

During the [Countdown](#) political debate, VoxCheck for the first time in Ukraine verified statements of participants in live mode. In 2019, we participated in 38 broadcasts, each of which was viewed by about one million viewers. In 2020, we continue to validate the participants of the "Countdown". In addition, video fact checks are weekly aired on UA:Suspilne.

With the support of Internews / USAID, we conducted 22 weekly ["Percentage of Truth"](#) radio programs explaining, for example, why Ukraine needs the IMF and how much taxes each of us pays. More than a million people have heard the broadcasts.

More than 40 students have undergone VoxCheck internships during which they have learned to think critically and verify facts. They are now members of the VoxCheck Alumni Club.

Together with Facebook, Fullfact, and our Ukrainian partners, we launched an advertising [campaign](#) on media literacy and critical thinking. Outreach of the Facebook campaign - 3.5 million users.

In 2019 we began to work in a new direction for us - refuting fakes. We select fakes, fraudulent posts and advertisements and report them to Facebook which removes them. The most successful example is the [refutation](#) of the fake news on the release of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Russian captivity. We investigated how the Russian side spread fakes which were then picked up by Ukrainian officials and bloggers. The refutation post itself became viral and was seen by more than 170,000 people, and shared by 1200 users.

Fact-checking activities provoked an information attack by pro-Russian politicians, which we have carefully [documented](#).

We also had a not very successful project this year – a website for coverage of Presidential actions – OkPresident. After analyzing all mistakes, we plan to restart it in March 2020.

In total, in 2019, VoxUkraine published 257 articles that were read by more than 1 million people on our site alone.

In addition, we...

...worked with journalists:

We dream that the Ukrainian media space is filled with quality economic content so that every willing Ukrainian can understand what is happening in the country. That is why we help journalists to write about the economy and reforms, and introduce them to reformers and experts.

In 2019, we created the VoxConnector Editors' Club, a community of local media editors who develop economic journalism. More than 20 editors have been educated and dealt with four important reforms - medical, land, energy reform, European integration and international trade development. The speakers were ministers and their deputies, leading experts and journalists. Club members are very satisfied with the course.

"Very useful and interesting. I've started to look different at some things. Previously, just didn't have a full understanding of the reform. "

Denis Kuznetsov, ZNTRC "TV-5", after meeting on medical reform

"Good organization and wonderful speakers; I was able to better understand the structure of the formation of the new state energy model. Additionally, I started working on several materials about the energy sphere "

Vladislav Bashuk, Tribune Online Edition, after a meeting on energy reform

"Well, a very useful format for journalists. It is a pity that the audience's interest in economic issues is not too high. But together we will try to convey the importance and benefit of economic topics for everyone. "

Yanina Tkachuk, Channel 24, after a meeting on land reform

Your club is incredible. This is not a compliment, because in addition to learning, it is also interesting to look for information on your resources and, in general, to discover facts that would be practically impossible to find elsewhere. I seem to be exaggerating. But we don't have anything like this at home, although there are some efforts. We want to open a press club for journalists later in the newspaper. We will ask for permission to use your information, or even the opportunity to invite speakers when arranging meetings on various topics of concern. "

Lyudmila Parkhomenko, Desnyanska Pravda

At the end of the year, we held a large conference "Transformation 2020: From Turbo Mode to Turbo Development" which was attended by 90 participants, one third of whom were local and national media journalists. Speakers [discussed](#) the achievements of key reforms and the country's 2020 prospects.

During the year with the help of experts we created and disseminated columns on current news and reform progress. Today, the VoxConnector expert community includes 76 people. For 2019, they wrote 113 columns that we distributed to regional media. Among other things, they wrote about the launch of transplantation, emergency care reform and vaccination, organic products market in Ukraine and natural gas market, coal industry reform and air purification methods, Ukrainian's household conditions and legalization of medical cannabis, road state fund, implementation of software cash registers for small business, women's employment.

In addition to the articles, we recorded explanatory videos. And if you haven't watched them yet, now is the time.

We are very grateful to the United States Embassy Media Development Fund and the MATRA program of the Netherlands Embassy for supporting the project.

We've educated and shared our experience

In 2019, we organized an “Interns with experience” program alongside the “traditional” internship program for students and invited students of The Ukrainian Leadership Academy (ULA).



...tried new formats

Since 2019, we have a video department that makes video factchecks and explainers. During the year, our small but powerful team made 81 videos and the newly created [YouTube](#) channel got over 4,000 subscribers.

More than 500 Instagram followers can see interesting graphs and "unofficial" photos of the team, and users of Telegram channels "4.2% of GDP" and "VoxCheck" receive interesting and proven news from the world of economics and critical thinking.

We hope, that you are following us across all platforms, and if not, it's time to stop reading the report for a minute and start following us :)

"However, the country is not living in the internet only" – so we thought and went outside.

We started our on street actions on April 2, the International Fact Checking Day. We have seen that it is interesting for people to learn new things and to test their ability to tell the truth from the lie. And also they realized that the good old print press (newspaper "Trust but Check" Довіряй-перевіряй) has its supporters, so we plan to issue it again this year.

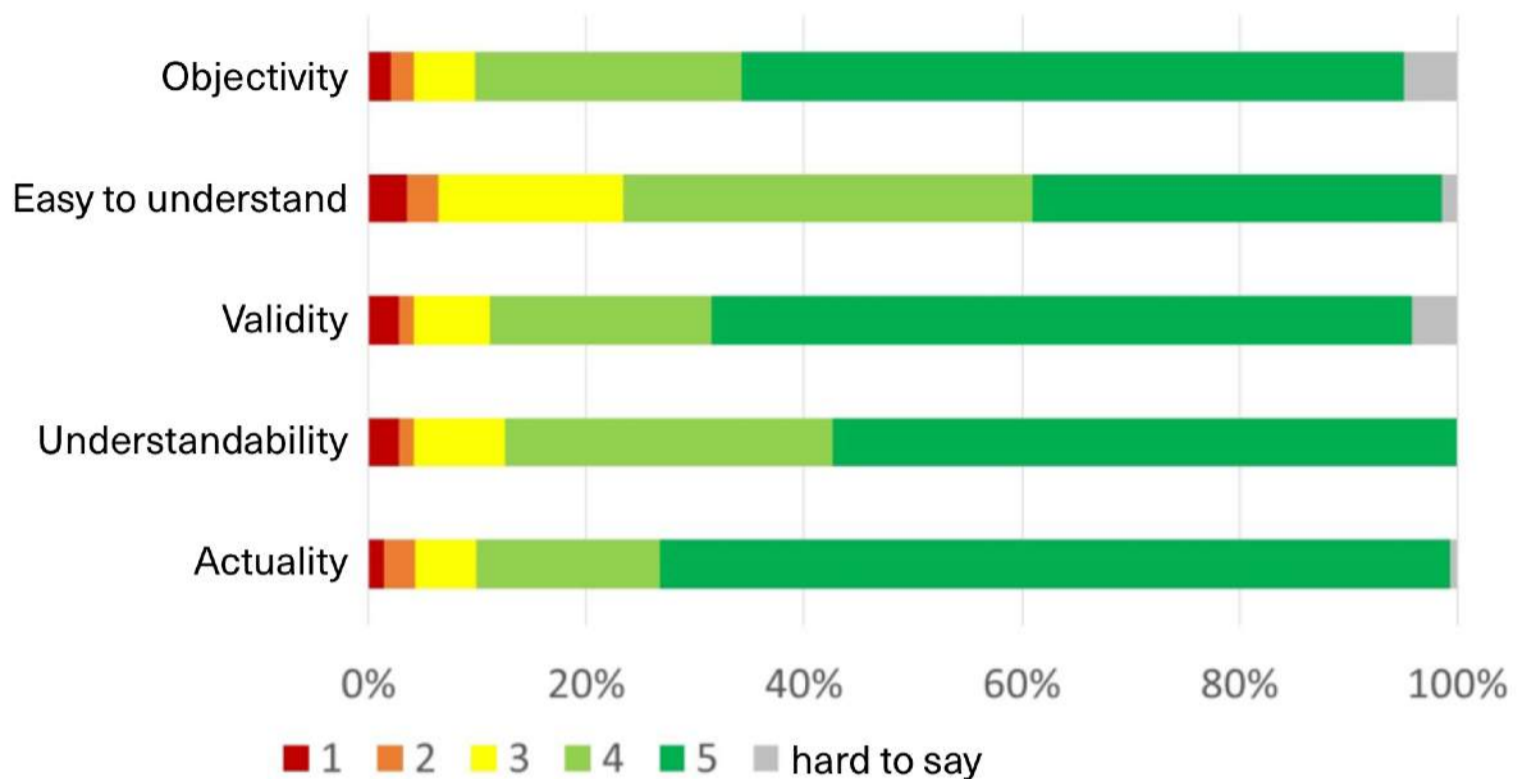
In addition, we've had a lot of fun with live communication during Sweden Day, Atlas Weekend, Zahid Fest and "Khortytsia" festivals.

We also held a "preventive rally" for the new Verkhovna Rada.



Traditionally, we've asked our readers what they think about us

They praised the quality of our articles:

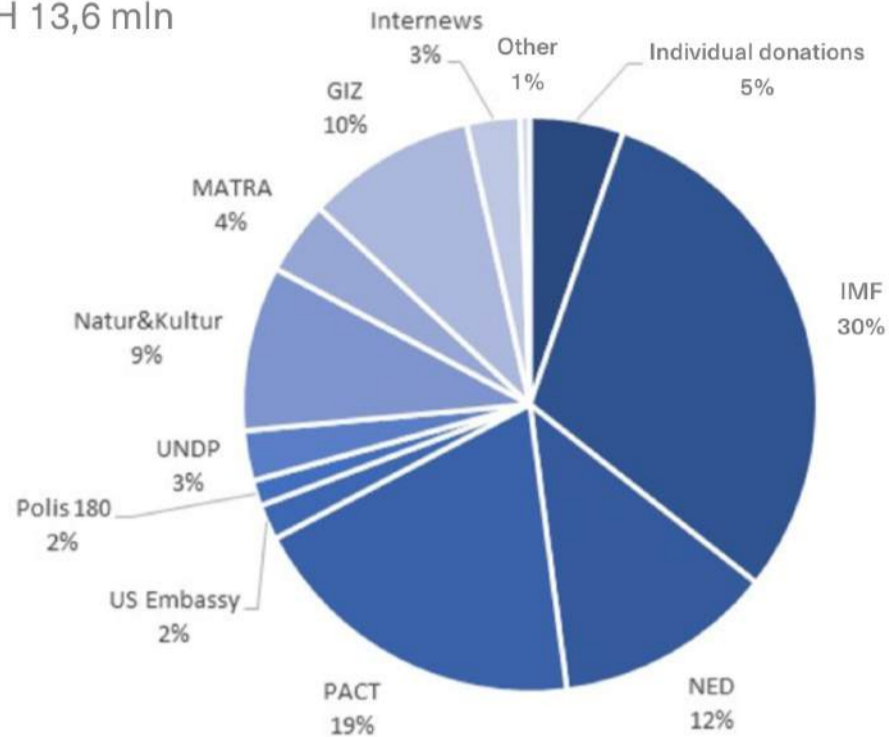


- A very interesting resource without propaganda and manipulation
- Sometimes I have to google some terms because I do not have a special education. Since I have rather radical political views from the current point of view, I am entertained by some moments in the promotion of liberal ideas.
- This is the least doubtful information
- Likes confidence in objectivity, absence of spontaneous, emotional publications despite of the "fever" of events
- More communication on FB with your readers ... would like Vox to become a platform for discussion ... for example your followers could post more comments after reading articles, participate in polls, etc.
- VoxUkraine articles are the most similar to "The Economist" in Ukraine. Critical, with figures, without "stories about the subject", reasoned. The only missing thing - weekly or monthly edition.

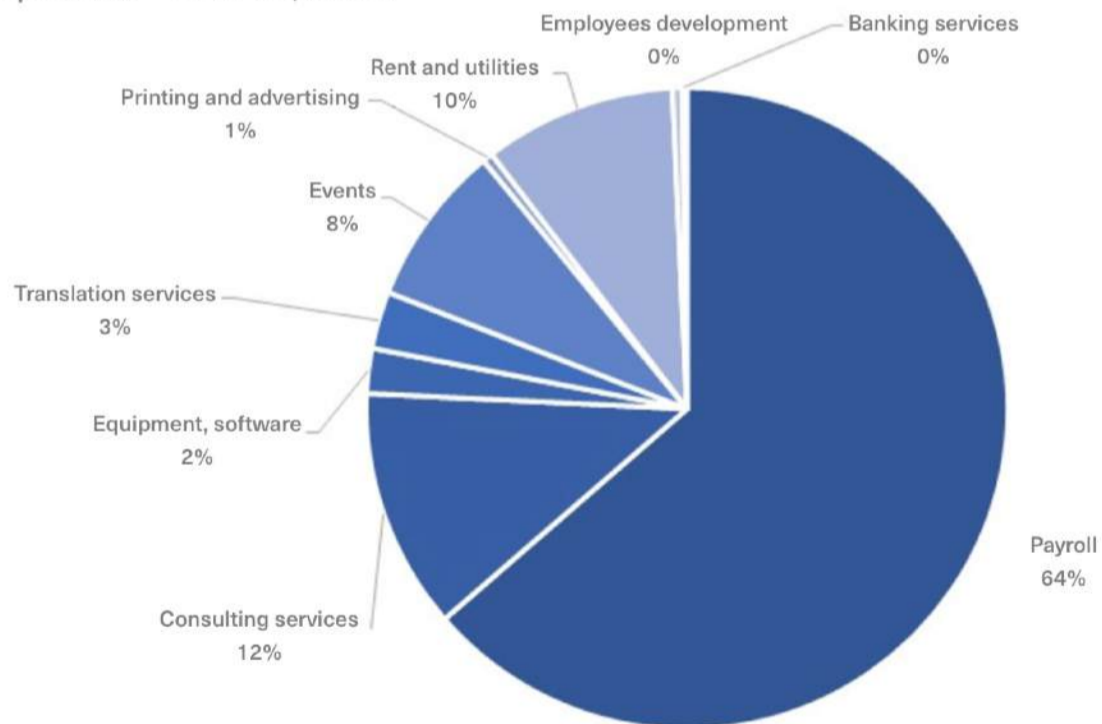
Financial report

All this activities would be impossible without support from our donors and our readers.

Income – UAH 13,6 mln



Expenses – UAH 12,5 mln



2020 promises to be a very exciting year for the world, the country and for us at VoxUkraine. Stay tuned – those who believe in the need for market reforms, professionalism, improving the quality of government and public policies. There is a lot of work ahead!