NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN ALBANIA

PARTNERSALBANIA
FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

CAPACITY AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN ALBANIA

Assessment Report

Tirana, 2019

Capacity and needs assessment for civil society organisations in Albania

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASCS	Agency for Support of Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
IPA	Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance
MM	Monitoring Matrix On Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania
NCCS	National Council for Civil Society
PA	Partners Albania
SE	Social Enterprises
VAT	Value Added Tax

INTRODUCTION

This assessment was conducted by the National Resource Centre for Civil Society in Albania, a platform for civil society in support of strengthening its capacity, policy dialogue and advocacy efforts for an enabling environment.

The Center is an initiative of Partners Albania, funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with the Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) and the European Movement in Albania (EMA).

The purpose of the assessment is to identify the organizational capacities of the sector at national level, the needs and challenges in organizational management and cross-sector cooperation, and to use this information to guide the design of training programs and technical assistance for civil society organizations (CSOs) that National Resource for Civil Society in Albania will provide as part of its first three-year program in support to the sector.

Considering the geographical coverage of the assessment, the representation of the CSOs and the wide range of issues that it covers, the findings may be useful to other organizations and institutions that contribute to the development of sector capacity and its support.

The assessment report provides an overview of the development of the civil society sector over the years, potential influencing factors as well as emerging trends in the sector.

In order to fully reflect the CSOs' view and attitude towards cross-sector processes and relationships of particular importance, the report includes also suggestions by CSOs on how to improve these relationships.

The National Resource Centre designed and developed a two-month process during May-June 2019 to assess the needs of CSOs across the country.

In order to collect quantitative data from a large number of organizations, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed and sent to all organizations part of the database of Partners Albania. From the start of its activity, Partners Albania has established the Directory of Civil Society Organizations based on a sector-wide assessment developed in 2001. Over the years, as an essential part of its work with CSOs and other institutions in the country, and within the role that PA has had as a resource and support organization for capacity building and enabling environment for CSOs, the database has been further enriched with updated contacts not only from the PA activity (trainings, conferences, meetings with CSOs) but also from other lists of state institutions and donors in the country. 157 organizations all over the twelve regions responded positively to the invitation to be part of the study. Although the number of

respondents is not very high, compared to the declared number of CSOs, we note that this number constitutes the largest part of active organizations in the country.

Subsequently, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted mainly with senior management (executive directors or presidents) and in their absence with senior program managers delegated by the head of the organization.

Pyetësori përmbante pyetje të hapura dhe të mbyllura që vlerësojnë kapacitetet e OSHC-ve, boshllëqet ekzistuese dhe nevojat potenciale për trajnim, në disa dimensione të zhvillimit të OSHC-ve dhe veprimtarisë së tyre si: (1) zhvillimi dhe qendrueshmëria organizative e OSHC-ve, (2) menaxhimi dhe qendrueshmëria financiare, (3) pjesëmarrja në nisma advokuese, (4) procesi i anëtarësimit të vendit në Bashkimin Evropian dhe roli i shoqërisë civile, (5) rrjetëzimet dhe koalicionet në sektor, (6) marrëdhënia me pushtetin vendor dhe atë qendror, (7) marrëdhënia me median dhe (8) marrëdhënia me sektorin privat.

The questionnaire included open-ended questions assessing CSO capacities, existing gaps and the needs for training and assistance, in several dimensions of CSO development and their activity such as: (1) organizational development and sustainability (2) financial management and sustainability, (3) participation in advocacy initiatives, (4) the country's integration in the EU and the role of civil society in the negotiation process, (5) networking and coalitions, (6) relations with local and central government, (7) relations with media (8) relations with the private sector.

Limitations of the assessment

There were identified two limitations during the data collection and assessment preparation: (1) the number of organizations interviewed which although seemingly low compared to the number of resulting organizations registered (2000+ CSOs registered with the General Directorate of Taxation), is a representative study sample because it covers most of the active organizations in the country; (2) CSOs self-reported data. The capacity assessment was based on information obtained through interviews with CSO representatives and their self-declarations on all the issues in the assessment. In that case, self-reported data are limited by the fact that they may be subjective and cannot be independently verified.

MAIN FINDINGS

I.   GENERAL DATA OF CSOs

The number of organizations interviewed for the purpose of this assessment was 157 organizations, with a wide geographical reach in the north, center and south of Albania.

From the organizations interviewed, 58% are registered and operate as Associations, 31% as Centers and 11% as Foundations.

The sectors of activity of the organizations participating in this assessment are diverse. Most of them work and contribute to more than one sector. Chart 1 shows the areas of activity of organizations part of this assessment.

Chart 1. CSOs field of activity
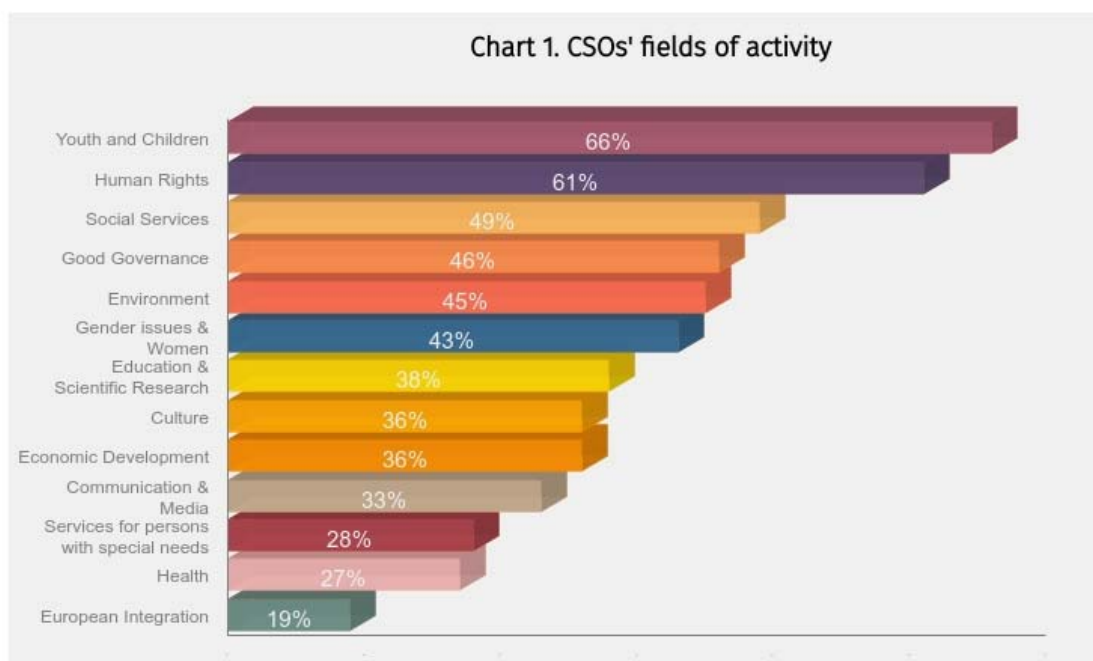
From the data collected, it turns out that the growth trend of the CSO sector, by the number of established organizations over 5-year intervals is stable with an average of 17% growth over time. If we compare growth for each interval of years, there are two moments where sector

growth is slightly higher than other intervals, more specifically over the interval of 1996-2000 with 8% growth and 2011-2015 with 12% (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Distribution of CSOs by year of establishment
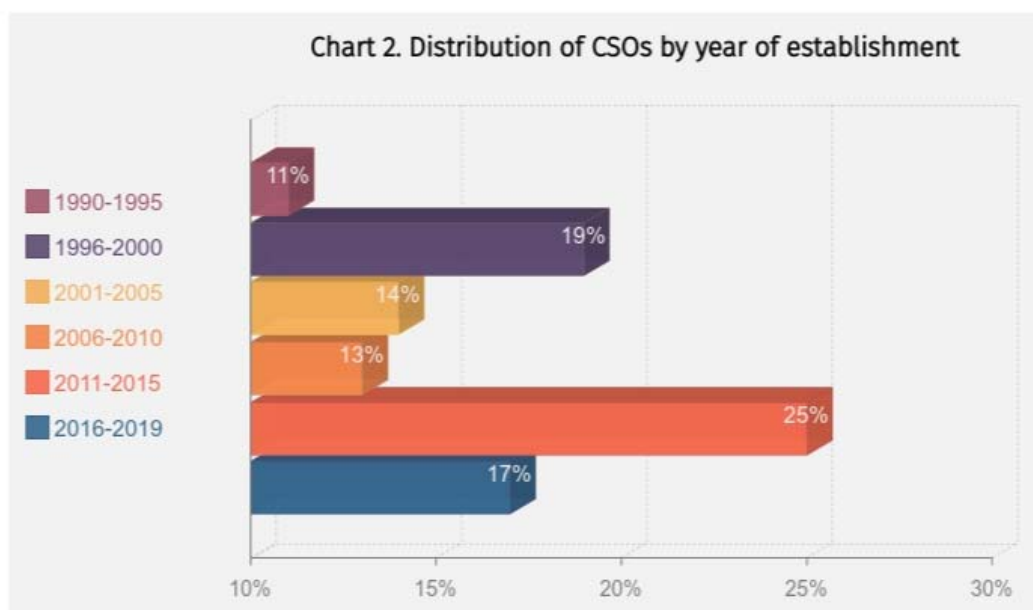
The period 1996-2000 coincides with a series of highly influential political-economic-social events in the country and region. The collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997 led to a collapse of social services and a deepening economic-social crisis. Further, the Kosovo war and the resettlement of Kosovo refugees to Albania created an emergency situation for the establishment and provision of social services but not only. These developments led to the creation and development of a broad community of nonprofits in diverse fields. (HRW, 1999). [1]

In the last decade there has been a sharp increase in CSOs in the areas of economic development, youth and children, good governance, education, and European integration.

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[1] Humans Rights Watch Report 1999 https://www.hrw.org/legacy/worldreport99/

However, despite the growing sector trends, the lack of unified available official data[2] of CSOs continues to put in question the real size of the non-profit sector.

The highest number of established new organizations, despite their focus on work, remains in the main regional urban centers. The central geographic region (Chart 3) remains the region with the highest concentration and growth of organizations compared to the northern and southern regions. This trend is mostly influenced by the number of organizations established in the city of Tirana, where the concentration of organizations is higher (39% of organizations). The same phenomenon is observed in the other two regions where the increase is mostly influenced by the concentration of organizations in the city of Shkodra with 13% of respondents for the northern region and Vlora with 16% for the southern region.

Chart 3. CSOs regional distribution by year of establishment

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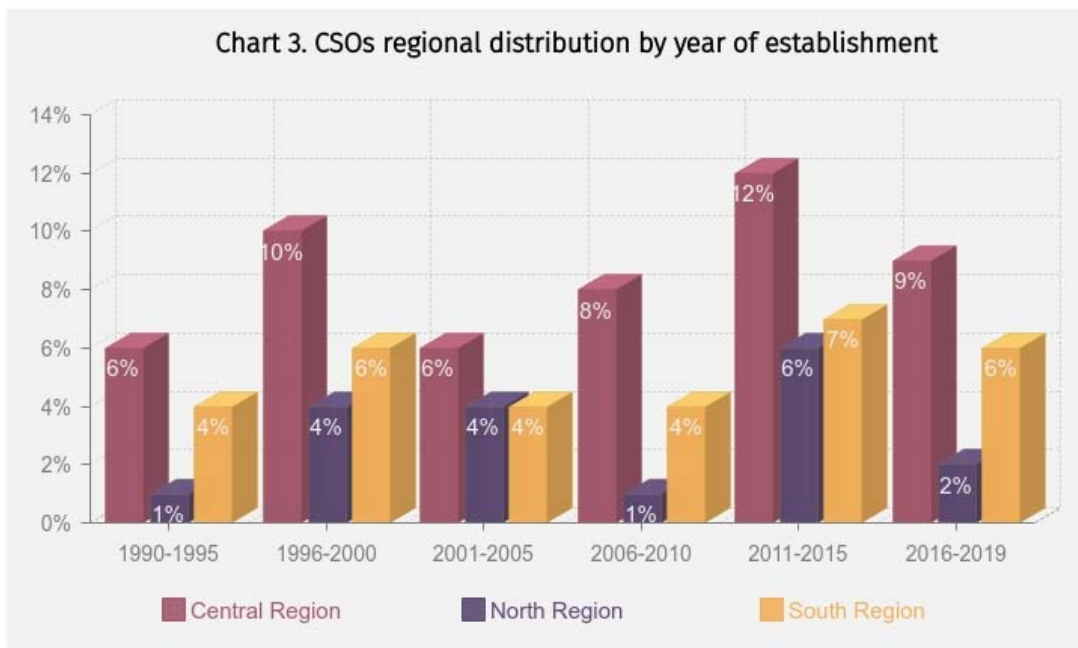
The tendency of CSOs to concentrate mainly in the capital or major city of the regions is a consistent trend over time. The combination of economic development and opportunities for

[2] The Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania, 2018 https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Matrica_monitorimit_Raporti_per_shqiperine_2018.pdf

better education has turned Tirana and other regional centers into major cities of population migration[3]. High population growth, as opposed to the slow pace of development of social services by local institutions, may explain the need to increase the civil society sector as an alternative response to innate social needs.

Most of the organizations, 61% of them operate at national level, and 42% at local level. As shown in Chart 4, the presence of Albanian organizations in the Western Balkans and Europe remains relatively low at 31% and 5%, respectively.

Chart 4. Geographical coverage of CSOs activity
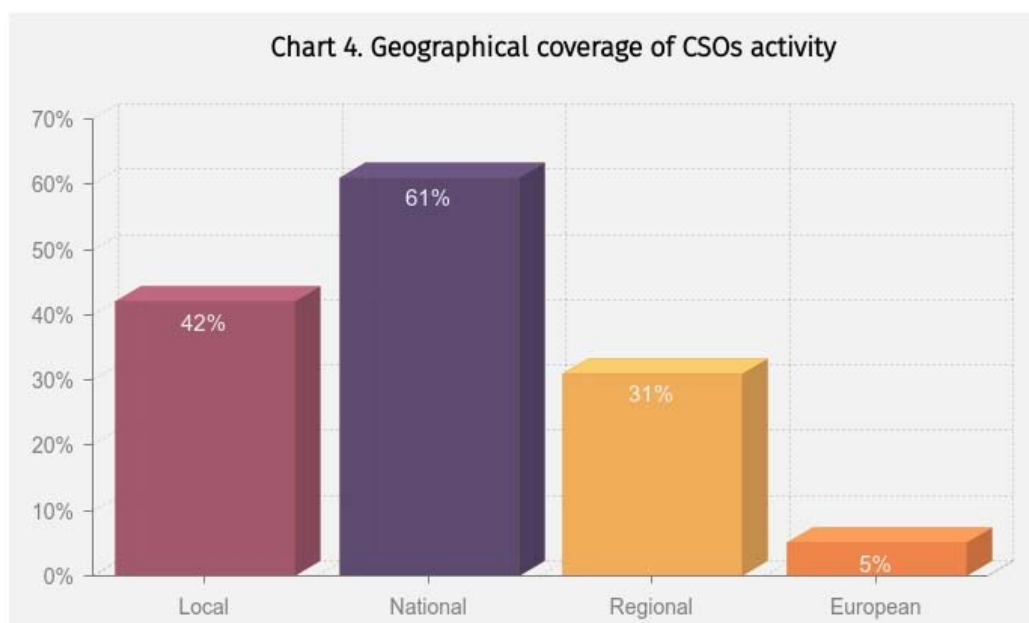
According to the assessment data, regarding employees, experts and volunteers engaged in organizations, 20% of CSOs state that due to lack of funds there were no full-time employees employed during 2018, while 3% of CSOs had no full-time or part-time employees, but only volunteers.

A large number of organizations report having part-time staff (76%) as well as volunteers (85%). In recent years, the contracting of short-term experts for the needs of the organizations

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[3] Migration in Albania 2014, Instat http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3078/migracioni_ne_shqiperi.pdf

or projects they implement has increased significantly. Thus, 68% of organizations state that they have worked with external experts in the last year (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Employment and volunteering

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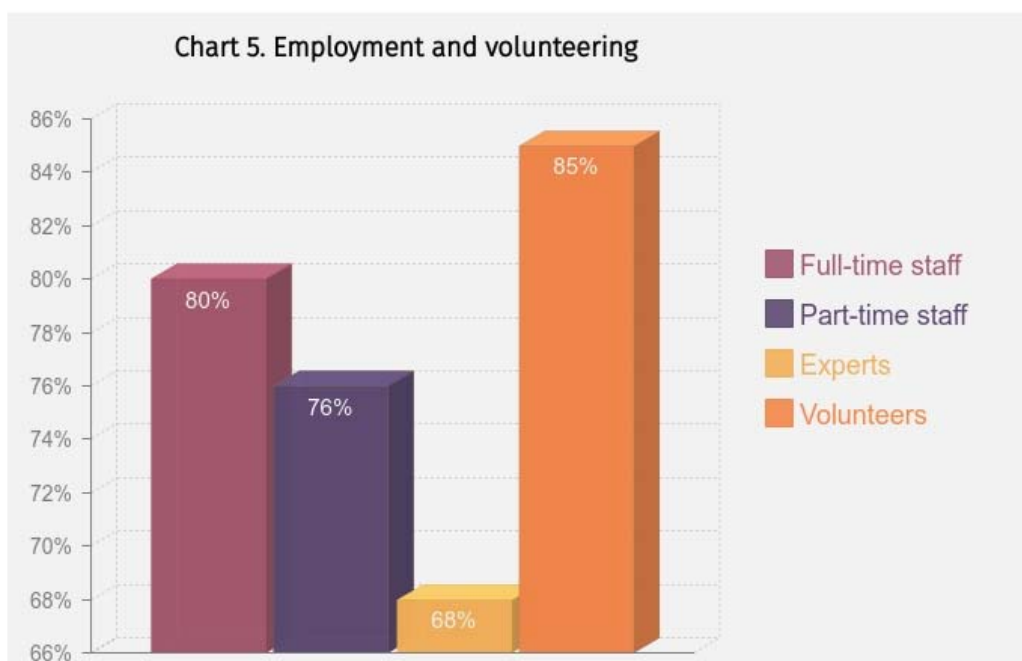
The average staff employment for organization is 6 full-time and 4 part-time employees. This result is particularly affected by some organizations mainly in Tirana that have large numbers of employees. Respectively, the average employment ranges from 9 employees per organization in Tirana to 4 employees per organization in other cities. In Tirana, full-time and part-time employment turn out to be on average 9 and 3 employees per organization, respectively. In organizations outside of Tirana, the ratio of full-time and part-time staff is almost the same (on average 4 employees). These data point to a more financially sustainable civil society sector in Tirana compared to the rest of the country.

The ratio of employment of men and women in civil society organizations since the beginning of the sector's activity has been dominated by women and girls. During 2018 as well, according to the assessment data, women and girls continue to be significantly dominated (Chart 6), this

being in line with the trend of employment nationwide where according to INSTAT men's employment dominates with 66.7%[4] of the employed in the labor market for 2018.

Chart 6. Women and Men employment ratio in the sector

Chart 6. Women and Men employment ratio in the sector

● Women	64%	● Men	36%
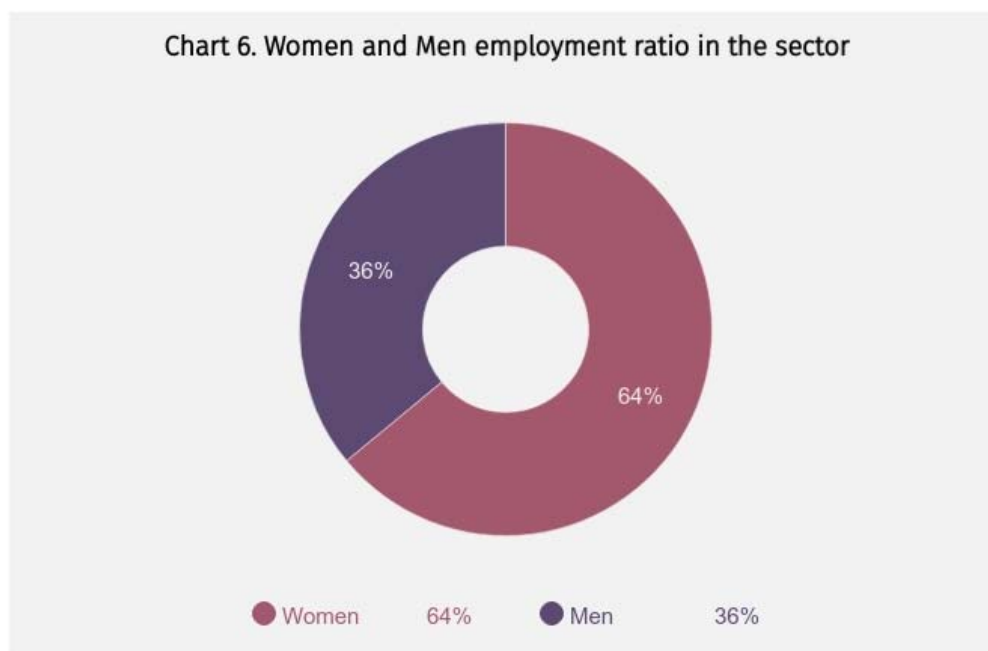
Volunteers are a very important part of CSOs human resources. According to the data collected, the number of volunteers engaged in organizations ranges from 4-12 volunteers on average.

If we analyze the distribution of volunteers by type of activity of the organizations, it results that volunteers are engaged in all organizations, regardless of their field of activity, however, the highest engagement is shown in organizations working with youth and children (58% of cases) and the field of human rights (46% of cases). The area of activity with the lowest engagement of volunteers turns out to be international relations and European integration, the area of health and services to people with special needs.

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[4] Women and Men in Albania 2019, Instat http://www.instat.gov.al/media/5956/burrat-dhe-grat%C3%AB-n%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABri-2019.pdf

The volunteering time of volunteers mainly varies from 1-3 months followed by 6 months to one year (Chart 7).

Chart 7. Average period of volunteering in CSOs

Chart 7. Average period of volunteering in CSOs

● Less then 1 month	18%	● 1-3 months	27%
● 3-6 months	17%	● 6 month-1 year	22%
● More then 1 year	16%		
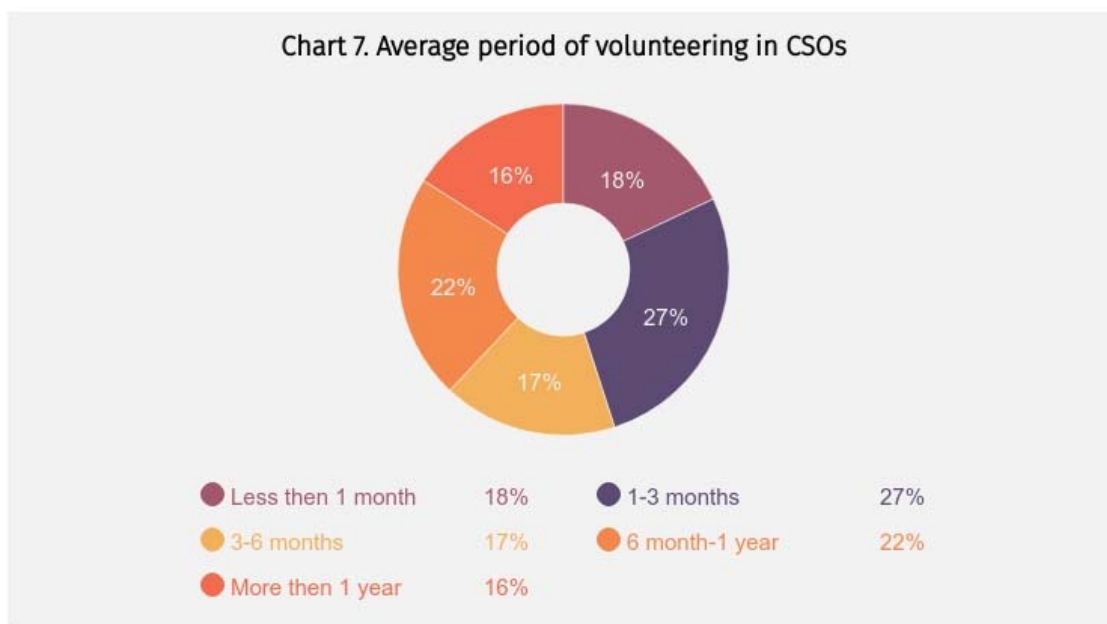
The main factors that influence volunteering in CSOs and the duration period of volunteers 'work are mainly the willingness of volunteers to contribute to the mission and cause of the organization's work; the duration of projects and activities where volunteers engage; enhancing personal and professional skills through interaction, participation in training and exchange programs. A small number of organizations (7%) state that volunteer engagement has been as part of the university practicum. In the past years, this number has been much higher and organizations state there have been many more volunteers engaged as part of these university and CSOs cooperation agreements for the engagement of students in CSOs as part of their practicum classes. Collaboration with universities and other pre-university education institutions now is seen as difficult and burdened with bureaucratic and obstructive procedures that hinder this cooperation and the engagement of young people in civil society organizations.

Despite the demands and willingness to volunteer, according to the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Albania Report 2018[5] (MM), almost three years after the adoption of Law 45/2016 "On Volunteering", the by-laws are expected to address the register of volunteers, the creation of public funding schemes, the creation of data collection tools on voluntary activity in the country and the code of ethics for volunteering has not yet been drafted. As a result, CSOs still face difficulties and uncertainties in involving volunteers in their projects and activities, exposing themselves to the risk of fines.

II. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Internal policies and procedures and strategic documents

According to the assessment data, 65% of CSOs have internal organizational policies and procedures, adopted by decision-making bodies, which regulate the activity of the organization. Most of these procedures have been developed in recent years, also as an orientation and/or request from donors or organizations that manage donor projects with sub-granting schemes. In some cases, local organizations have also been supported by them to draft and develop further these internal policies and procedures, with the aim of enhancing CSO standards, performance of their operations and sustainability of the sector. Chart 8 presents data on a series of procedures that CSOs declare they have. How these procedures are designed, what is their content, and how well they are known and implemented by executives, employees, and volunteers of organizations, is an information that was not the subject of this assessment and could not be verified.

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[5] The Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania 2018 https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Monitoring-Matrix-Country-Report-for-Albania-2018.pdf

Chart 8. CSOs internal policies and procedures

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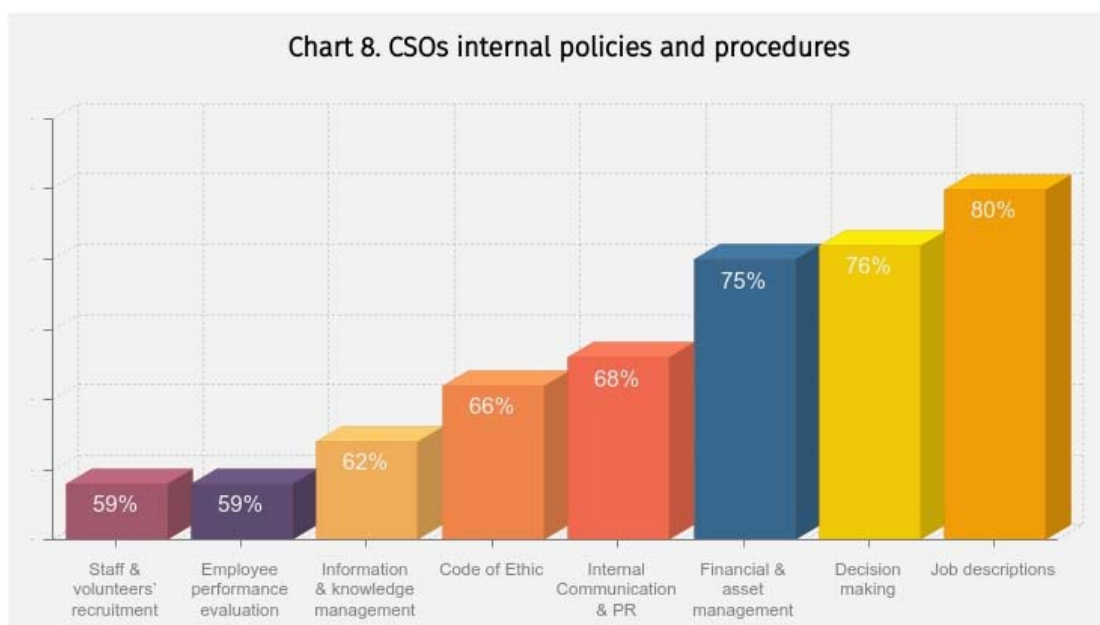
Strategic planning is a key factor for the development of civil society organizations and their sustainability. It is very important but at the same time it can be very complex and difficult to be developed especially for small organizations without much capacity. According to the assessment data, 58% of organizations have a strategic plan. The rest of the CSOs clearly express the need for guidance and support in drafting such a plan. In the meantime it should be emphasized that this need is also stated by CSOs that have a strategic plan, as it is a basic document for the development of the organization and needs to be reviewed and developed periodically.

Having a strategic plan according to the assessment, turns out to be unrelated to the year of establishment of the organization. Its absence is stated by both long-established organizations in the sector and new organizations.

The development of strategic objectives in 93% of the cases turns out to be based on the mission and status of the organization, followed by development based on the needs of the beneficiaries with 73% of the cases and the needs of the organization itself in 61% of the cases. These data indicate a change in the orientation of CSOs in the development of the strategic plan. Referring to the 2011 Sector Needs Assessment conducted by Technical Assistance for Civil Society

Organizations (TACSO), the organizations practiced the so-called "mission creep" known as the practice of dropping out and / or abandoning mission, vision and organizational strengths in favor of pursuing funding opportunities. Meantime from this assessment results that only 51% of the organizations interviewed are based on key donor policies and programs for the development of strategic objectives.

Regarding the process of strategic plan development, 80% of organizations state that they have drafted the strategic plan through an internal process involving the staff, the board of the organization and its beneficiaries. Contracting external experts to facilitate this process (mainly local but also foreign in a few cases) is one of the ways used by a significant part of organizations (36%), while 28% of organizations state that they rely on experts facilitators from their main donor for this process.

CSOs needs and challenges in organizational development and sustainability

Regardless of its development, the civil society sector being a dynamic sector faces a series of consecutive challenges that bring continuous needs. The most challenging issues for organizations and their activities, according to CSOs, are: (1) Lack of funding (2) Legal and fiscal framework for CSOs (3) Lack of cooperation with local/central government and non-involvement in policy making and (4) Lack of mechanisms / inability to participate in tenders for the delivery of public services.

These four needs from an analytical point of view can be considered as closely related and directly influencing factors to CSOs' efforts to address them.

Lack of funds and the difficulty of obtaining them are considered as the biggest challenge that organizations declare, which directly affects their financial sustainability. This challenge becomes even more difficult when "fueled" by the problematic and non-enabling and / or problematic fiscal legal framework. A reference example of this is the payment of Value Added Tax (VAT) by CSOs for projects funded through the IPA funds of the European Union (EU). Although VAT reimbursement of these funds is a government obligation under the implementation of the agreement with the EU, there is still no official confirmation[6] on VAT reimbursement for IPA scheme projects implemented by CSOs. The fiscal treatment of CSOs

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[6] idem

remains problematic[7] and represents a major impediment to their operation, development and sustainability.

On the other hand, access to public funds as a funding opportunity for CSOs is considered challenging due to the lack of differentiated of the non-profit sector. Thus, during 2018, no legal initiative[8] on public procurement law that would facilitate CSO participation in public tendering processes was undertaken or discussed. The legal and regulatory framework presents many challenges and issues to address in order to create an enabling environment for CSO involvement in the provision of social services with public funds.

Regardless of the existing legal frameworks, the use of local government assets or access to funds for social service providers and sharing of service costs with central and local institutions turns out to be extremely difficult, almost impossible in the local context.

The Law "On Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania" was adopted in 2016 and a number of bylaws have been adopted over a three year period. However the Legal package has not yet been implemented due to the ambiguities it carries. Given the social impact of the work of CSOs as social service providers as well as the different nature that has from the business sector, the creation of legal mechanisms and facilities is an urgent need to enable a more appropriate environment for organizations to work on raising alternative funds and offering of their expertise as a service provider.

Promoting and enhancing the visibility of offered services not only in the context of fundraising by donors or businesses but also in order to be as close as possible to the beneficiaries and to inform and raise awareness of them, is stated as another need among CSOs part of this assessment.

Lack of cooperation with the local government and non-involvement of CSOs in decision-making and policy-making processes remains a constant problem of the civil society sector, despite the improvement of the legal framework on information, consultation and public engagement in recent years. This indicator is also supported by the MM findings for 2018 where although the adoption of Law 146/2014 "On Notification and Public Consultation" is considered a progressive law, its implementation is weak in almost all respects[9]. Despite efforts to create a regulatory environment that is as enabling as possible for the civil society sector, its non-implementation impedes the sustainable development of CSOs.

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[7] idem

[8] idem

[9] idem

CSO capacities and their training needs

Capacity building of the staff, according to the assessment data, is considered as one of the main factors affecting the sustainability of CSOs. Despite the challenges and difficulties faced in their work, 94% of the interviewed organizations state that they create opportunities for capacity building of the staff. Most of this is made possible by attending trainings organized by other CSOs providing this service on issues of organizational development as well as other specific issues according to the focus of CSO work (Chart 9).

The use of new capacity building methods such as e-learning, although recognized as cost and time efficient, remains at low levels in only 16% of cases.

Chart 9. Tools used by CSOs to increase the staff capacities

Chart 9. Tools used by CSOs to increase the staff capacities

- E-learning — 16%
- Short Courses — 25%
- Exchange programme/visits — 43%
- On the job training — 51%
- CSO own trainings — 58%
- Other CSOs trainings — 85%
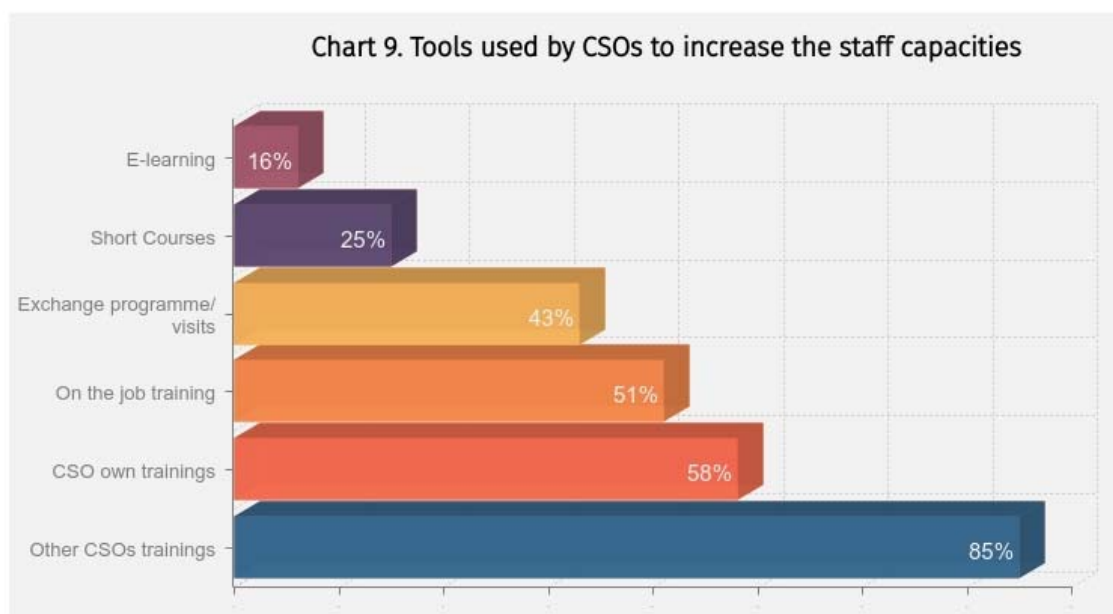
Assessment data regarding training needs and topics of interest for CSOs continue to reflect the above mentioned issues.

As shown in Chart 10, the highest interest for capacity building of CSO management staff is on the topics of fundraising and revenue generation, followed by strategic planning, social entrepreneurship, networking / coalition building and fiscal legislation and financial reporting.

Financial sustainability remains one of the most challenging issues for civil society organizations everywhere. CSOs mainly rely on grants, but based on a recent study, 93%[10] of CSO representatives say that getting grants has become very difficult in the last 18 months. That is why organizations are directing their efforts in this regard towards raising funds and finding other alternative sources of income to secure their social mission[11]. One of the forms of fundraising is social entrepreneurship, for which in the last decade there has been a growing effort by actors to regulate this field, including policy makers, who have realized the enormous potential of social entrepreneurship. Increasingly, social entrepreneurship is seen as an important tool towards an equal society and a contributor to social and economic development[12].

Although the assessment data show that a considerable number of the interviewed organizations have a strategic plan, strategic planning is still identified as a training need for management staff. The need to increase and improve knowledge in terms of the strategic planning of an organization may relate to the above needs and efforts to explore and work in new and different forms than the traditional form of CSOs, as for example the funding through grants.

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[10] Crowdfunding Platforms – An Alternative Source of Funding, Partners Albania 2019
http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Crowdfunding_platforms_an_alternative_source_of_funding.pdf

[11] idem

[12] Analysis of legal framework on social enterprises in Albania, Partners Albania, 2019
https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Analyses-of-legal-framework-on-social-enterprises-in-Albania.pdf

Chart 10. Training topics of major interest for CSOs directors and senior management

Chart 10. Training topics of major interest for CSOs directors & senior management

Topic	Percentage
Conflict Management	23%
Stress Management	32%
Teamwork	34%
Public Speaking	43%
Strategic Communication & PR	44%
Leadership/ Effective management	45%
Organisational Development	47%
Tax Legislation & Financial Reporting	56%
Networking/ Coalition building	58%
Social Entrepreneurship	60%
Strategic Planning	66%
Fundraising & Revenue Generation	79%

The situation is almost the same for training needs identified for capacity building of CSOs' staff. Of greater interest is the increase of knowledge and skills of staff on EU funding programs, the project proposal writing as per the requirements and formats of the European Union, and the development of project proposals in general (Chart 11). Considering on the one hand the fact that the European Union is increasingly expanding its presence with funding programs for Albanian CSOs at the local, regional and European level, and on the other hand the complexity of the calls and capacities needed to respond in a timely and quality manner, the need for CSOs to strengthen capacity in this regard remains high.

Other topics of high interest for training of CSOs staff are fundraising and revenue generation as well as project management.

Chart 11. Training topics of major interest for CSOs staff

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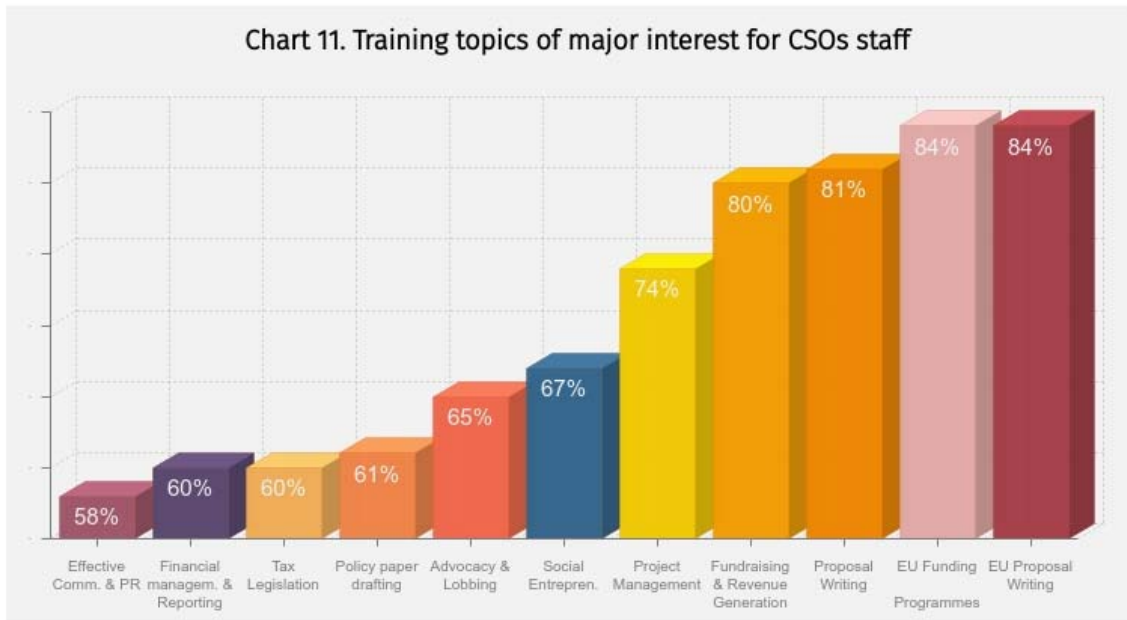
Assessment data show that despite the age of the organization, the need and interest in training topics is at the same level, both in new organizations and in organizations with many years of experience. For example, fundraising and revenue generation, fiscal legislation, management and leadership, and other topics, have more or less the same level of interest both in new and experienced organizations.

Chart 12. Training topics of major interest for CSOs according to their year of establishment

Chart 12. Training topics of major interest for CSOs according to their year of establishment
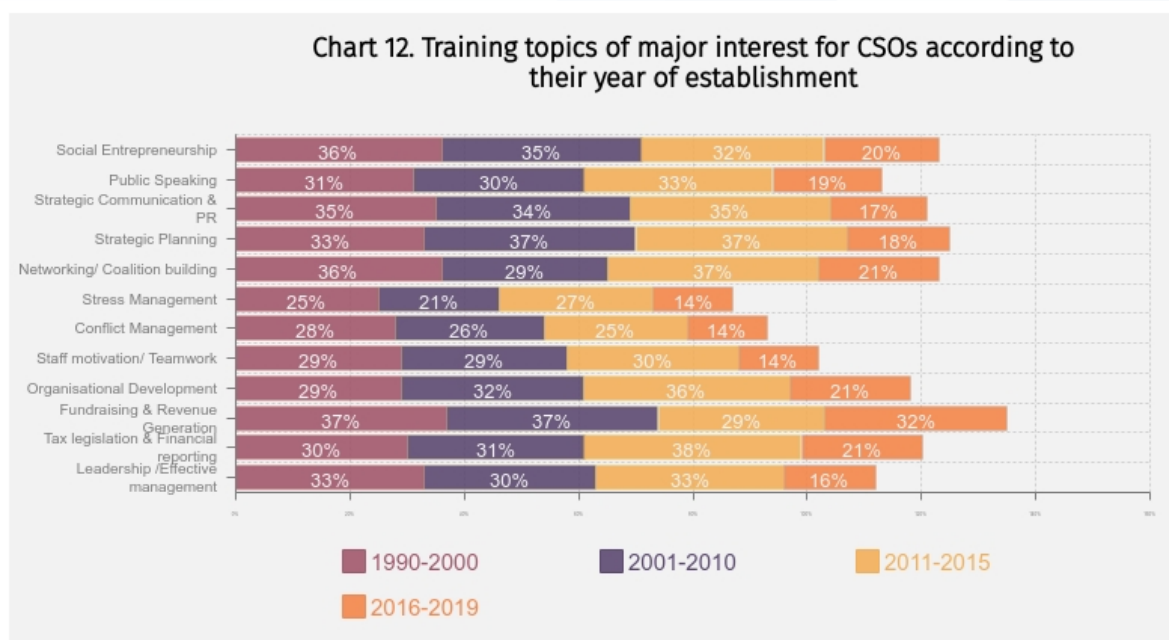
Other needs of CSOs for capacity building

In addition to the training, which remains one of the key tools for building and strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations, CSOs part of this assessment have identified a number of other needs that affect organizational development such as lack of qualified human resources, (especially outside Tirana and other major cities in the country) lack of space where CSOs operate (office infrastructure and logistics), lack of fiscal incentives for the sector; lack of cooperation and interaction with institutions at local level; lack of recognition of the work and contribution of CSOs; difficulties in mobilizing community and volunteers, etc.

The lack of partnership and inter-sector networking between CSOs in the country and abroad is another major need identified in the sector. CSOs state that the partnership is mainly seen in the application and implementation of joint projects within organizations with similar mission and scope, as well as in gaining knowledge and experience from more developed organizations mainly in urban areas (especially in Tirana). Lack of activities and support for networking and partnerships; the limited number of exchange programs to learn from good models and best practices; study visits that enable further advancement of CSOs etc. are some of the needs

identified by CSOs. Low access and participation in regional and European networks is also a need that remains to be addressed, aiming at institutional strengthening, fundraising and increasing visibility and public relations with other actors.

Reporting and transparency of CSOs

Transparency is considered as the cornerstone in building the trust and image of an institution. As such, the more transparent a non-profit organization is about its activity, the more trust it can create towards partners, stakeholders, donors, government institutions and the general public.

79.5% of the interviewed organizations report that they produce annual reports on their activity. 65% of the organizations involved in the assessment have as part of their report information on their financial activity. But the situation is different in terms of publishing and sharing reports with the public or the other stakeholders. Only 58% of organizations publish and share annual reports through their communication channels within the sector, stakeholders, and beyond, while 20% of organizations result in sharing reports and information on their activity only with the donor, the board of the organization and their partners (Chart 13).

Chart 13. Annual Report Publication from CSOs
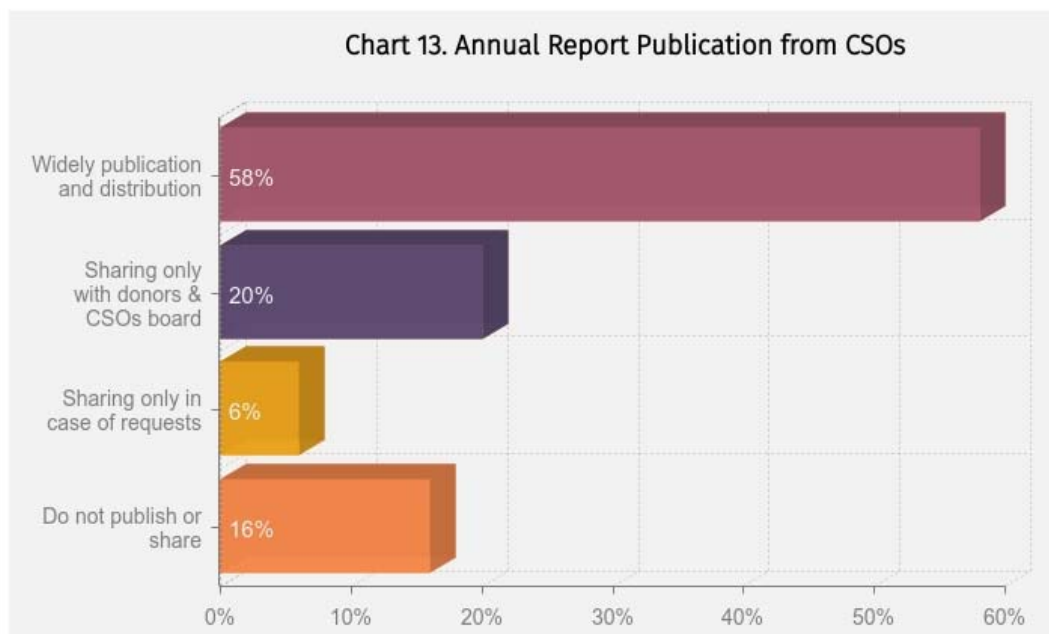
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Transparency in the sector remains an issue that needs to be worked on by the whole sector in order to its further improvement.

III.   FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Aiming to assess the capacities and needs of the sector in financial management and sustainability and to provide an overview in this regard, the CSOs involved in the assessment were asked on a series of issues related to funding sources in general and more specifically for the last fiscal year (2018), the access to these resources, challenges and difficulties etc.

As shown in Chart 14, the main source of funding for CSOs remains grants. Almost half of the CSOs interviewed stated that among the sources of funding for 2018 have been the grants / sub-grants provided by local or international non-profit organizations in Albania. In recent years, some of the main donors in the country such as the European Union, the Swiss Government through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) etc. have been extensively implementing sub-grant schemes as part of their projects, aiming to achieve and support widest range and grass roots organizations.

Some of the organizations (18%) did not provide information about the sources of funding and their distribution according to the sources.

Chart 14. CSOs income according to the resource category

Chart 14. CSOs income according to the resource category

Category	Percentage
ASCS	6%
Others	8%
Central Government	10%
Local Government	12%
Individuals donations	12%
In kind donations	15%
Memberships fees	20%
Multilateral Agencies	21%
CSO`s Revenue Generating Activities	22%
Business donations	29%
European Union	30%
Foreign governments/donors	31%
Grants/sub grants from CSOs	48%
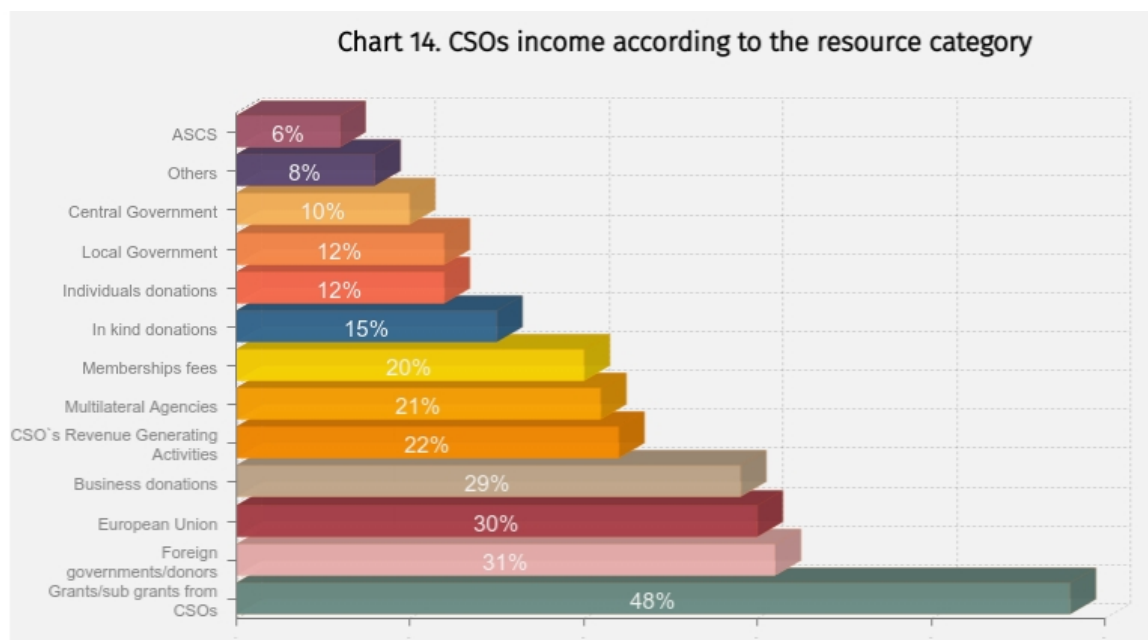
Among the major donors and funding programs mentioned by respondents are: the European Union with the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), the Union Programmes and the Regional Program for Local Democracy (ReLOaD); The Swiss Embassy in Albania and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); United States Embassy; Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; United Nations Development Program (UNDP); UNFPA; The Swedish Government's SCPA Program "Strengthening Community Policing in Albania" through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA); Olof Palme International Center; GIZ; World Bank; Austrian Development Agency (ADA); Bread for the World; Canadian Fund for Local Initiative; International Orthodox Christian Charities and Global Giving etc. Among organizations and programmes with grant/sub-granting schemes, CSOs have mentioned LEVIZ Albania, Partners Albania, National Resource Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center (ANTTARC), Save the Children, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), Albanian Helsinki Committee, Terre des Homes, Regional Environmental Center (REC), Dorcas Aid Albania.

Whereas among the state institutions0, CSOs mentioned as a source of funding the Ministry of Culture (among the institutions at central level) and the Municipality of Tirana, the Municipality of Korça and the Municipality of Librazhd (among institutions at local level).

Income from funds from local government is only 12%, while those from central government are even lower compared to other sources of funding, only 10%. According to the Monitoring Matrix for 2018, data on public funding for CSOs are not public and are not easy to access. Transparency of distribution of public funds is low and remains a matter of concern for the sector. Despite the fact that public institutions have well-defined rules and procedures on it, the information made public is incomplete and not in accordance with the established standard.

CSOs as service providers and their financial sustainability

The provision of paid services by CSOs to third-party in recent years has been increasingly used by the civil society sector as one of the forms of revenue generation.

According to the assessment data, only 32% of respondents surveyed if they conduct income generating activities or paid services claim to have such experiences. The services offered by them include training courses and expertise within and outside the sector, handicrafts, coffee bar and catering services, tourist guides, medical services and social services. Another form of revenue generation in CSOs as part of this assessment is the leasing of the organization's premises to third parties as well as the establishment of social enterprises.

Geographical distribution of organizations that offers these services extends across the three regions but the largest concentration remains in the city of Tirana (40% of cases) followed by the city of Shkodra (21% of cases). The data once again support the findings of previous studies on CSO initiatives in income generating activities where this model[13] is considered unexplored by other cities in the country.

Asked about the reasons for not engaging in paid services practices, CSOs who did not have such experiences, to a considerable extent, state that they consider the process difficult and challenging (27%) and they have lack of knowledge. and lack of capacity to develop and manage such activity (Chart 15).

Chart 15. CSOs reasons for not engaging in fee for service practice
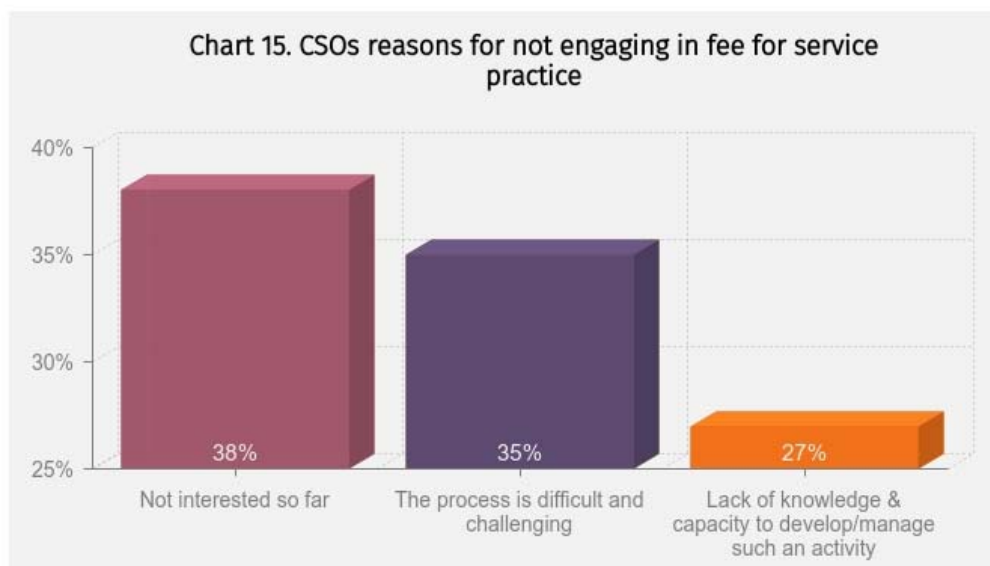
Involvement in income-generating activities and provision of paid services, often considered incompatible with CSOs' nonprofit activity, is not properly understood and still further prejudiced and judged. The study conducted by Partners Albania "Readiness of CSOs for Revenue Generating Activities" (2018) lists a number of challenges faced by CSOs that provides paid services, such as: lack of institutional support for grants and / or initial capital to

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[13] Readiness of CSOs for Revenue Generating Activities, Partners Albania, 2018
https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Gatishmeria_OSHCve_per_Perfshirje_ne_Aktivitete_qe_Gjenerojne_te_Ardhura.pdf

invest in quality services and products and the ability to market them professionally; lack of entrepreneurial experience that can lead to "losing money on unnecessary things / steps"; lack of knowledge about fiscal policies and tax regime for the profit sector. The study identifies the need for capacity building of CSOs in this field and equipping of these enterprises with the necessary skills.

Asked if they plan to get involved in providing new paid services, 43% of CSOs claim to be interested and 33% state that maybe in the future they may engage in such activity (Chart 16).

Chart 16. Plans of CSOs to be engaged in fee for services in the future
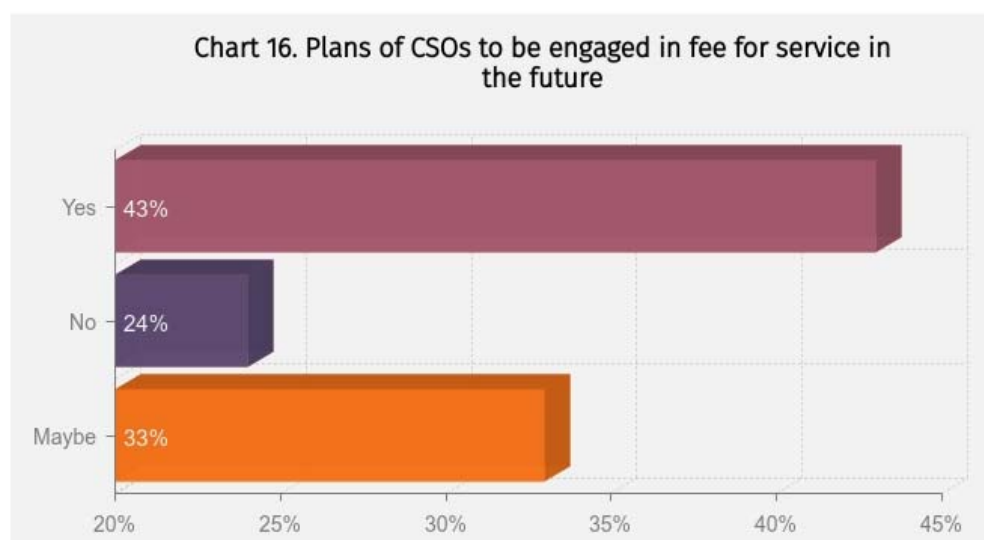
The same attitude (with the same percentages of responses) is also observed in the interest in establishing a social enterprise (SE). 67% of the surveyed organizations claim to be aware of SE law but only 6% of them have applied according to legal procedures to obtain SE status.

The needs identified by CSOs in this context are numerous, starting with capacity building for situational base line assessment, generating innovative ideas, designing appropriate and effective services, developing business plans and managing a business plan, increasing knowledge of the relevant legal framework, supporting with financial and logistical resources

such as materials and space for the activity, exchange and sharing of good experiences and successful models within the sector. It also identifies the need to change the legal framework for SE for a more enabling environment for their development, promotion, support through the application of subsidy schemes, and also provision of assistance in fundraising and revenue generation for such an enterprise.

Funding sources and accessibility

As shown in Chart 17, access to funding sources, whether foreign or domestic donors, funding agencies, state institutions, etc., is 79% on average classified as difficult (very difficult, difficult, somewhat difficult). The lowest access in funding results in ASCS, central government, local government and business.

Chart 17. Access to funding sources
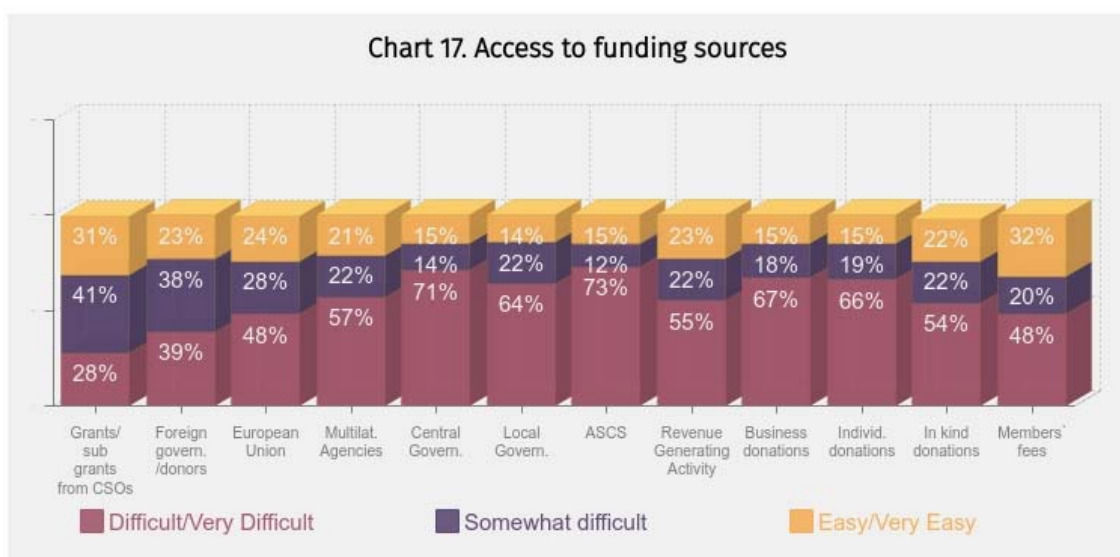
Assessment data show that the financial viability of organizations remains one of the constant concerns of civil society organizations regardless of the field in which they operate, their years of experience or location. 67% of CSOs state that they do not have a reserve fund in their organization.

Asked about possible recommendations for increasing access to EU funding schemes, CSOs suggest:

- ✓ approximation of tax legislation (deduction of VAT) as in neighboring countries on projects funded by EU programs;
- ✓ more priority and increased access to EU funds for local CSOs who provides services; applying local criteria or calls and facilitating procedures for this category of organizations;
- ✓ easier reporting procedures;
- ✓ identifying and creating opportunities to cover the required percentage of co-financing, because organizations cannot afford it.

CSO needs for financial sustainability

Sustainable financing and securing long-term funds remains the basic need for most organizations. Funding sources mainly those from public funds, whether local or central, are considered as one of the most sustainable financing alternatives to the expertise and services that CSOs can provide. The data show an orientation of the sector's needs for financial sustainability towards **revenue generation as a service provider**. **Diversification of funds and the provision of local funding schemes** by the main donors, including the EU, is another need expressed in this context.

Among other needs listed by the interviewed organizations are: **Increasing staff capacity** in writing project proposals, raising funds, providing paid services and building social enterprises; **Exchange of experiences** and cases of good practice in country and abroad, mainly in creating a favorable environment and provision of paid services or setting up a social business; and **Networking** to increase the opportunities to benefit from calls for funding mainly from international organizations and the EU as well as from cooperation with the private sector.

IV.   PARTICIPATION IN ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

Advocacy and participation in decision-making are one of the main pillars of civil society's efforts to protect citizens' rights and address their needs at central and local government

institutions. As such, developing the capacity of CSOs to do effective advocacy and respond to citizens' needs is of particular importance.

As part of this assessment, 79% of CSOs state that they have been involved in advocacy campaigns in the last 5 years. This inclusion turns out to be mainly as part of initiatives undertaken by a group of organizations (54% of cases) and to a less extent as part of initiatives undertaken by the organization itself (42%) or in collaboration with another organization (29%). (Chart 18).

Chart 18. CSOs engagement in Advocacy Initiatives in the last 5 years

Chart 18. CSOs engagement in Advocacy Initiatives in the last 5 years
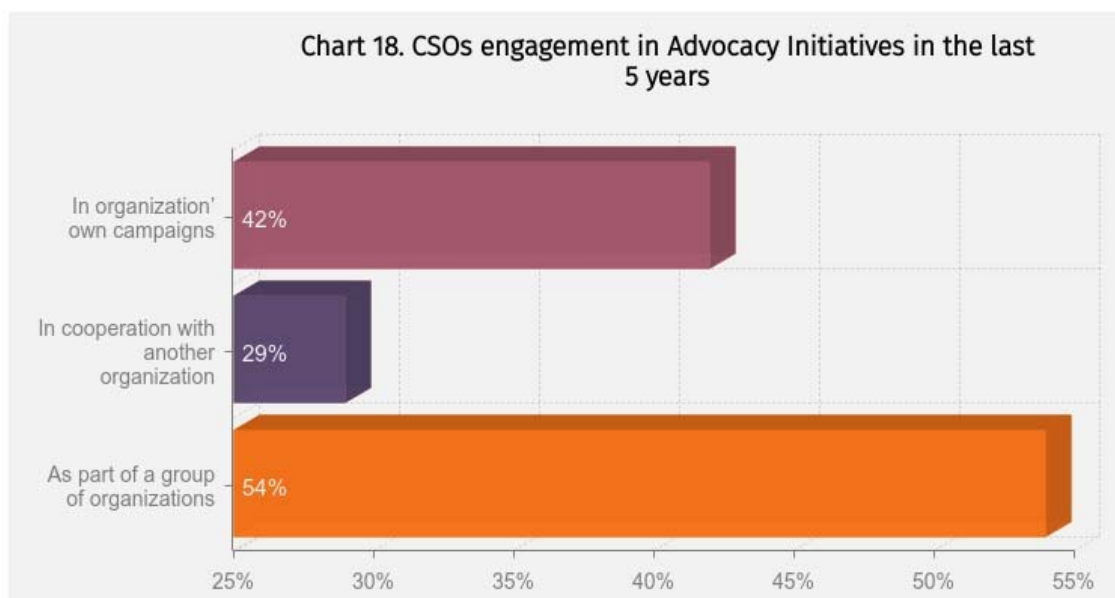
Asked about the possible reasons for not being involved in advocacy campaigns (21% of organizations that have not been involved in such campaigns in the last 5 years) state the difficulty of networking and joining other organizations in an advocacy campaign as well as the lack of financial capacity for such initiatives (Graph 19). It is worth noting that 21% of CSOs that are not involved in advocacy campaigns state as a difficulty in getting involved the fact they receive government funding (at local and central level). This result, although not in a high percentage of CSOs compared to the total CSOs part of the assessment, raises a concern about freedom of expression and addressing citizens' problems at central and local level.

Chart 19. CSOs reasons for not engaging in Advocacy Initiatives

Chart 19. CSOs' reasons for not engaging in Advocacy Initiatives
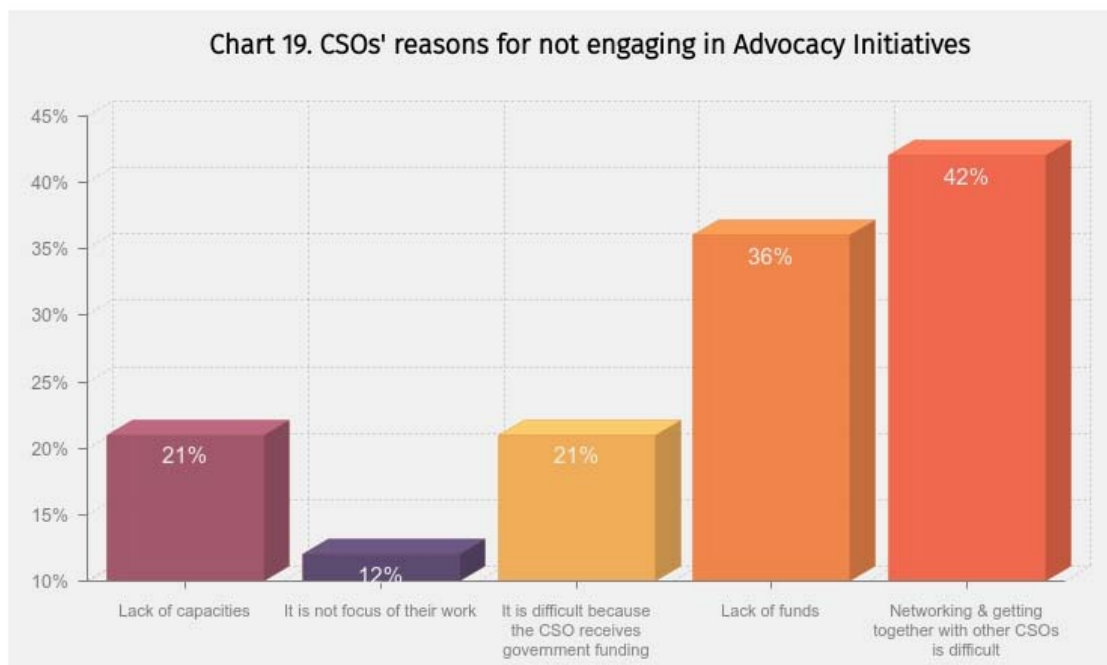
The advocacy issues that CSOs are involved and engaged at most are: women's and girls' rights, gender equality, the fight against domestic violence, the fight against human trafficking, rehabilitation and integration victims of trafficking, the right to information and participation in local decision-making, environmental protection, the rights of children and youth, the rights of persons with disabilities, freedom of media and speech, housing, immigration and migration, reform justice, reforms in education system, etc.

Regarding the level of advocacy and the geographic coverage of the advocacy campaign, CSOs generally declare that they have conducted advocacy campaigns or become part of national and local campaigns. In the context of the implementation of regional projects and beyond at European level, CSOs have also been involved in advocacy initiatives at these levels in recent years (Chart 20). Despite this involvement, the number of campaigns at such levels is not very high, and mostly at the level of project activities and campaigns, rather than sustainable initiatives followed-up in continuity and coordinated by co-operation platforms of CSOs.

Some of the issues that CSOs advocated at regional and European level are human rights, Roma

community integration, women's rights and gender equality, environmental protection, creating an enabling environment for CSOs, improving the implementation of labor legislation on occupational safety and health, combating violent extremism and radicalism, and increasing regional co-operation etc.

Chart 20. Advocacy initiatives of CSOs by geographical coverage

Chart 20. Advocacy initiatives of CSOs by geographical coverage
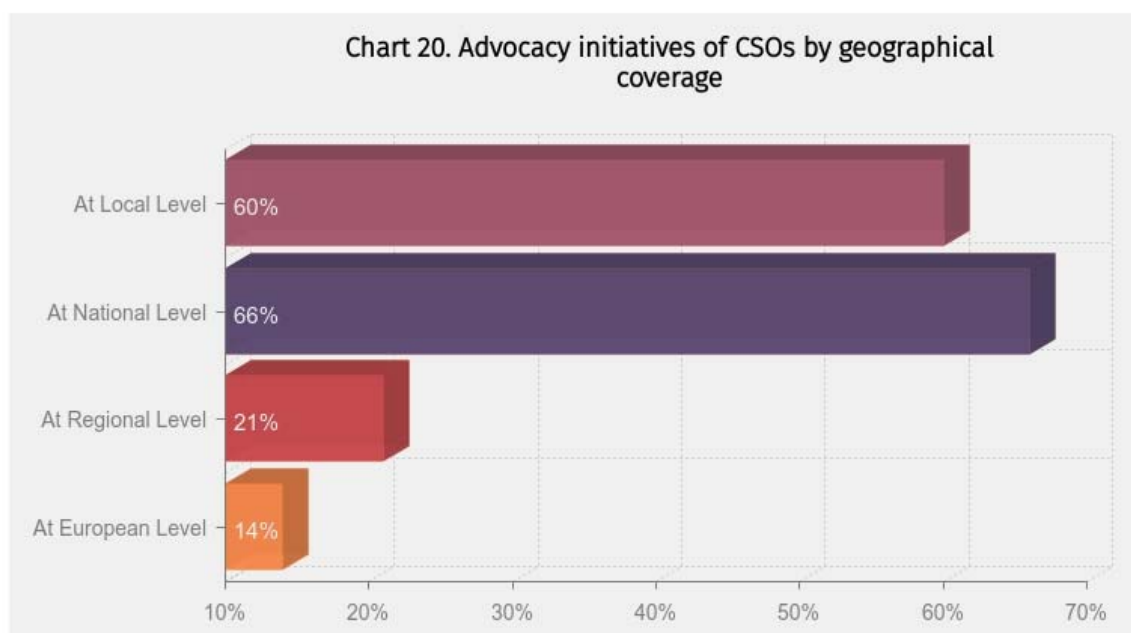
CSOs needs for effective advocacy

Advocacy as one of the main pillars of the work of civil society organizations in order to be effective requires effort and investment in time, and in human and financial resources from CSOs.

The civil society organizations part of this assessment, beyond the so far mentioned findings, have identified a number of needs as follows, in the context of their advocacy capacity and further empowerment in this regard.

- Lack of CSOs capacity to build effective advocacy campaigns;
- Lack of cross-sector cooperation and networking at in the country and beyond for a greater and sustainable impact;

- The difficulty in mobilizing citizens on issues of importance to local communities and the country (mobilization remains low);
- Low level of volunteering and disadvantaged legal and regulatory framework;
- Lack of financial sustainability, which directly affects the lack of advocacy initiatives at local and central level.

V.   EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THIS PROCESS

The process of the country's accession to the European Union and its significant impact on current and future socio-economic development requires the engagement of all stakeholders in society. Although state institutions are directly responsible for fulfilling the legal obligations throughout the EU integration process, civil society organizations according to EU policies and programs, are considered one of the key actors directly involved in this process.

92% of the organizations that are part of this assessment consider as very important and important the role of civil society and its involvement in the process of country's accession to the European Union (Chart 21).

Chart 21. Civil society role in the integration process

Chart 21. Civil society role in the integration process

● Very Important	73%	● Important	19%
● Fairly Important	3%	● Slightly Important	3%
● I have no information	2%		
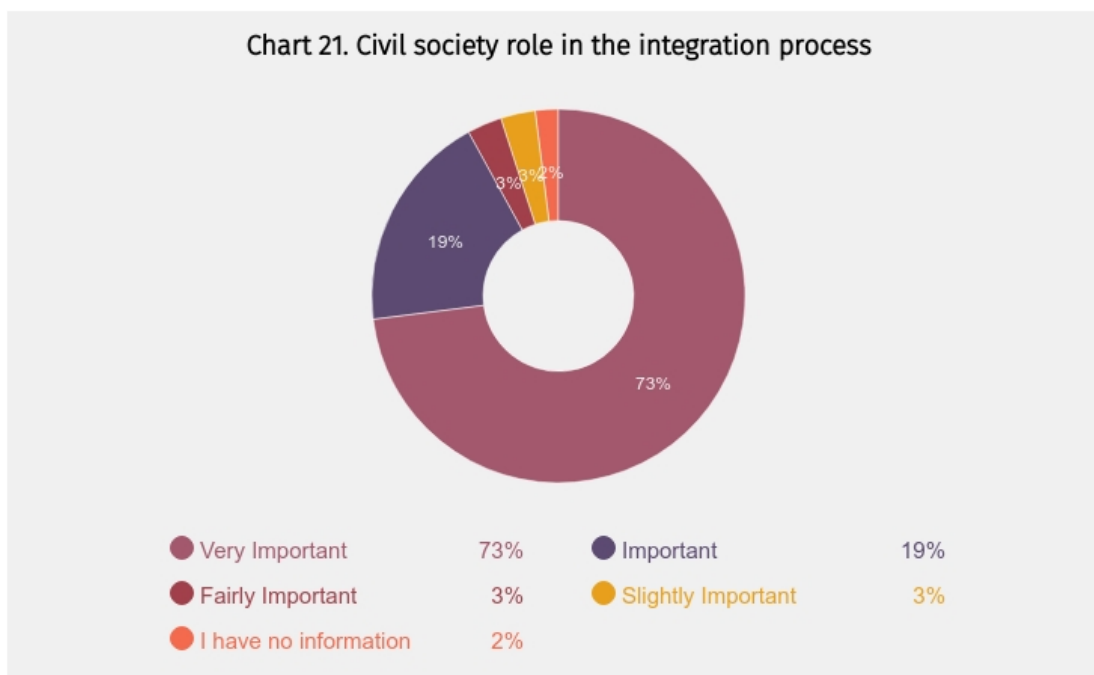
Despite the above consideration for their role and recognition of the importance of sector involvement in this process, almost half of the CSOs in the assessment state that they have some, very little or no knowledge of the integration process and the role of CSOs in it (Chart 22).

Chart 22. Level of knowledge of CSOs on the integration process and their role in it

Chart 22. Level of knowledge of CSOs on the integration process and their role in it
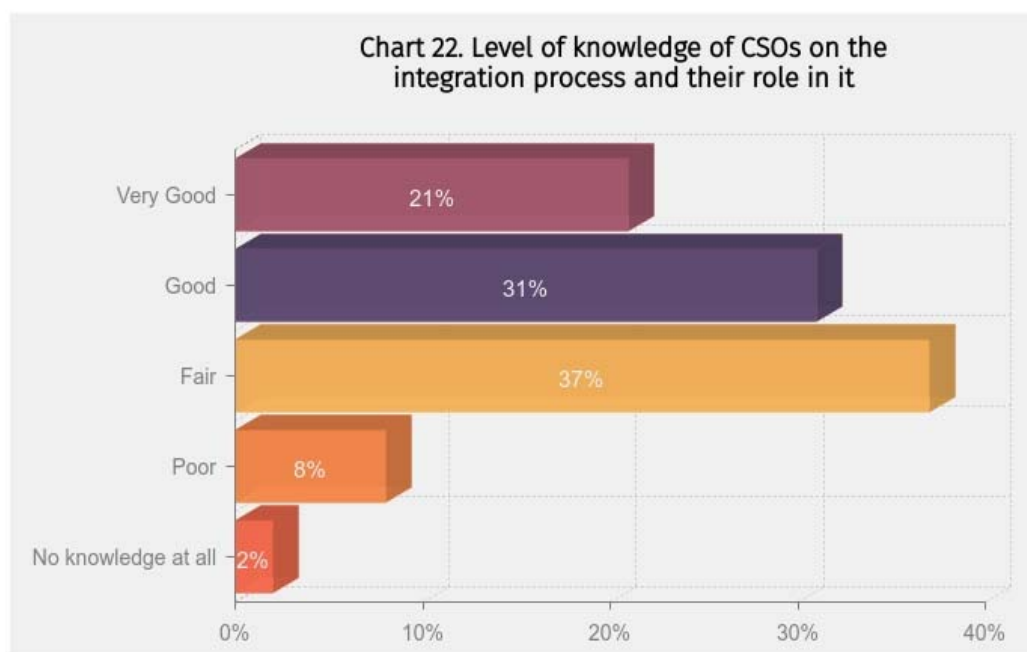
CSOs see the role of civil society in the integration process mostly in informing and raising public awareness of this process, in monitoring the implementation of law and public policy throughout the negotiation process and less in providing expertise in the areas of negotiation (specific Chapters) and participation in inter-institutional working groups on EU integration (Chart 23).

Chart 23. Areas of contribution of CSOs in the integration process

Chart 23. Areas of contribution of CSOs in the integration process
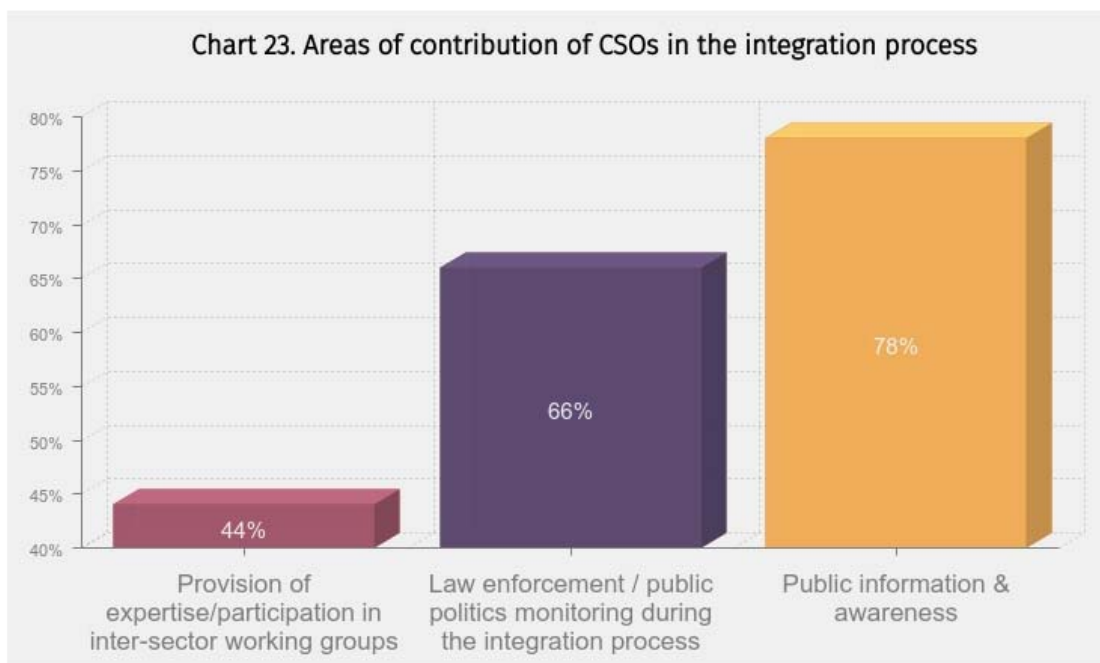
Regardless of the level of knowledge of the role of CSOs or differences in defining their role in the EU integration process, the willingness to be included in the process if offered such an opportunity results in 87% while 11% of the surveyed organizations say that they are not sure as they are not clear about the role and contribution they could make. Only 2% of CSOs are not interested in being actively involved in this process.

In the framework of the country's integration into the European Union and strengthening of the civil society, it is important and is also identified as a need by CSOs a better information of support programs such as IPA, regional programs and Union Programmes. Only 41% of CSOs declare that they are familiar with these programs, while others do not have much information (Chart 24).

The main programs recognized by CSOs are: IPA Cross-Border Cooperation, INTERREG, Civil Society Facility - CSF, Europe for Citizens, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), Regional Democracy Program Local in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD), ACHIEVE - Albanian Civil Society for a European Environment in Albania.

Chart 24. CSOs level of knowledge of EU funding programmes

Chart 24. CSOs level of knowledge of EU funding programmes
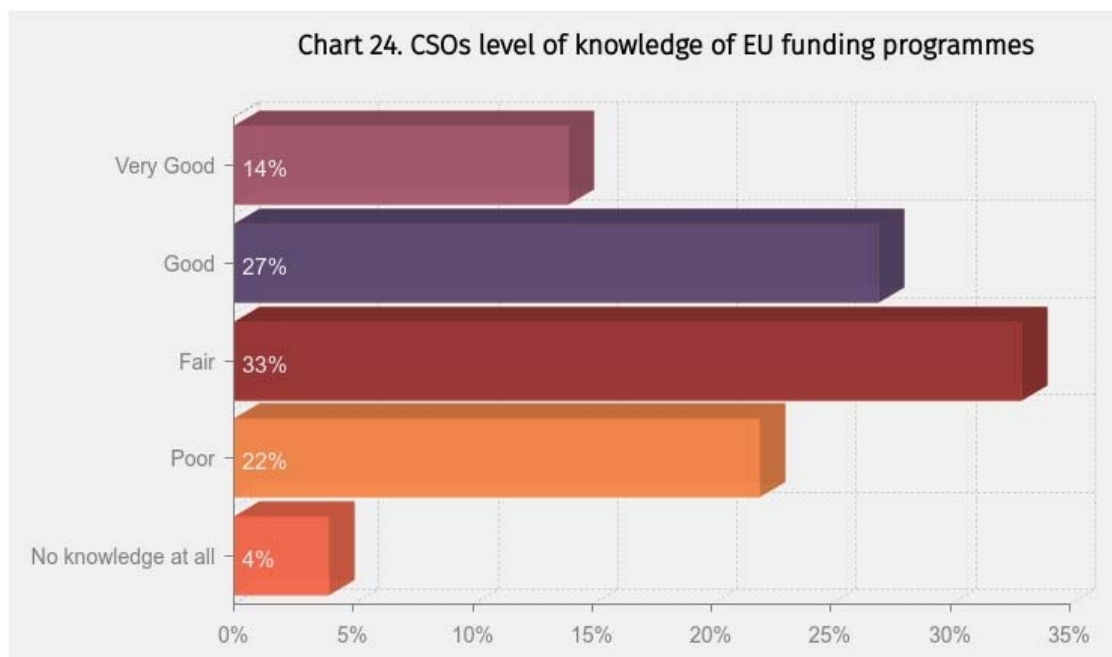
VI.   NETWORKING AND COALITIONS

The capacities and needs of CSOs for collaboration and grouping into coalitions and networks, whether formal or add hoc, take on particular importance in the context of amplifying intervention and / or advocacy issues and increasing the impact on the general public and decision-making institutions.

According to the assessment data, 72% of organizations are part of a network / coalition, among which 63.5% are formal networks legally registered.

The geographical extent of the networking activity where the surveyed organizations participate is mostly national, in 59% of cases, followed by regional in 34% and European in 31%. The inclusion of interviewed CSOs in networks with local coverage, is at a lower percentage (only 25%) (Chart 25).

Chart 25. CSOs networks/ coalitions activity geographical coverage

Chart 25. CSOs networks/ coalitions activity geographical coverage

- Local 25%
- European 59%
- Regional 34%
- National 31%
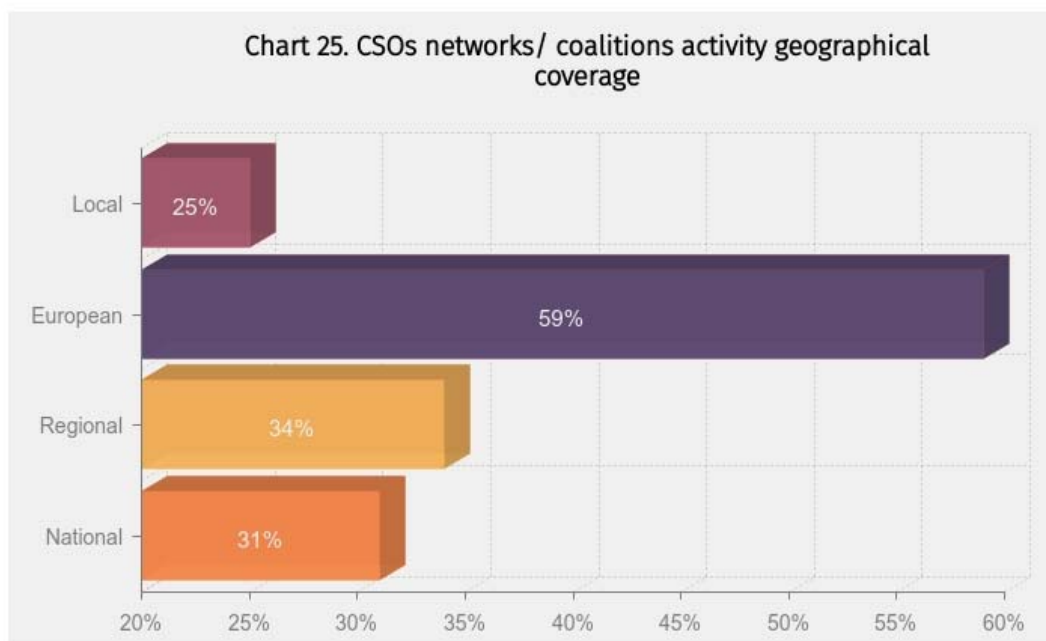
The tendency of CSOs to become part of broader networks (national level rather than local) can be explained by their interest and need for greater impact and higher visibility and the fact that for many issues such as those related to the environment, social policies and services, fiscal treatment, etc. decision-making belongs to central government institutions.

Asked about the advantages of being part of a network / coalition, 79% of CSOs consider participation networks as an opportunity to have a greater impact as well as better protection and representation of the interests of the groups that organizations represent. Being part of networks / coalitions is also considered as an opportunity for more synergy and avoiding overlapping of the same activities (60% of cases) but also as a factor which creates more access to funds (37% of cases).

On the other hand, working in networks and coalitions is accompanied by many challenges and difficulties. Chart 26 presents some of them, identified by CSOs as part of this assessment based on their work and experience.

Chart 26. Challenges on working in a network/ coalition

Chart 26. Challenges on working in a network/ coalition
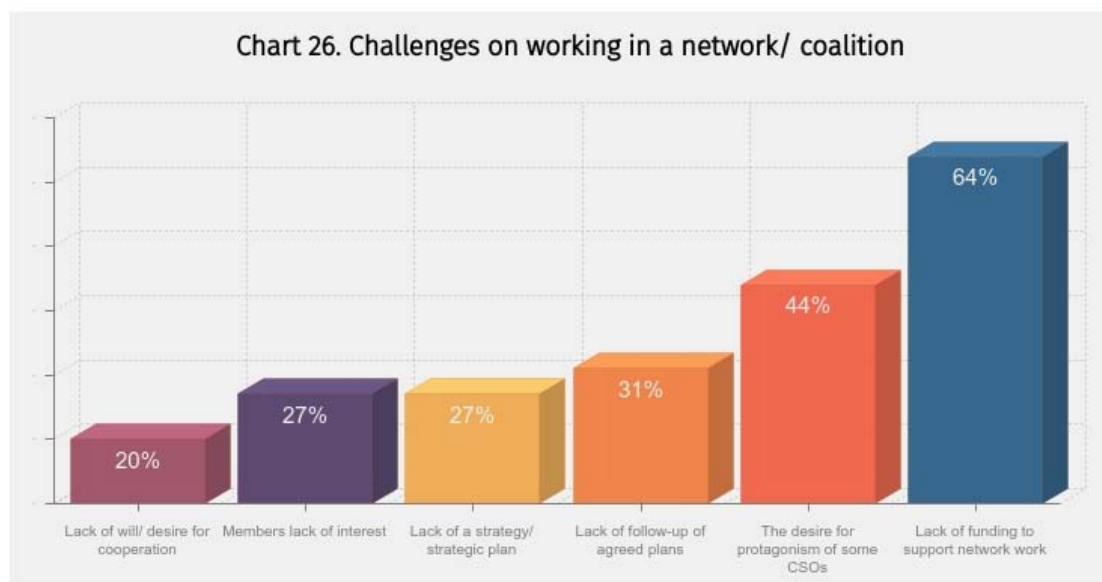
Despite the challenges and difficulties, 94% of the interviewed CSOs remain willing to join networks and coalitions if such an opportunity is offered or if the need arises.

CSOs are primarily interested in networking and coalitions with other organizations that have the same focus of action and similar interests. Topics listed by CSOs interviewed for potential networks / coalitions are those on: protection of young people's rights and youth economic empowerment; protection of the environment and protected areas; amending and improving the legislation for CSOs mainly in the creation of fiscal facilities and social entrepreneurship; gender equality; integration of marginalized groups and national minorities, and Albania integration in the European Union.

VII. CSOs - GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

Assessment data show that CSOs' relationship with local and central government still needs a lot of bilateral efforts to increase transparency, trust and cooperation. 52% of CSOs declare that they rarely cooperate with central government institutions, while 27% of them state that they have no cooperation at all. The situation is somewhat more positive with regard to local government but still problematic, with 43% of CSOs declaring that they have close cooperation, 44% having little cooperation and 13% having no cooperation at all (Chart 27).

Cooperation with state institutions at central and especially at local level continues to be determined by the degree of recognition and relationships with key representatives of the administration and the head of the institution.

Chart 27. CSOs cooperation with central/ local government
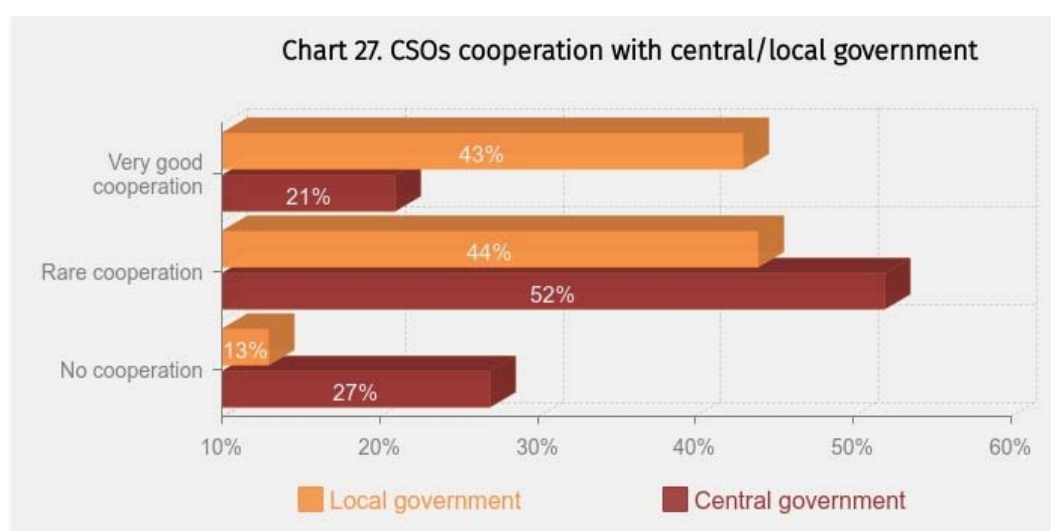
More than half of the surveyed organizations are unaware of strategic documents for CSO-government cooperation, and only 20.2% of them claim to have been involved in the implementation of these documents.

Only 47% of CSOs surveyed are aware of the existence of institutions specifically set up for cooperation between the two sectors, among which 67% have identified the Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS), 16% the National Council for Civil Society (NCCS), while the rest referred to mechanisms set up within the protection of certain vulnerable groups or structures at the ministry level, highlighting a significant lack of information and knowledge of the sector's own representative structures by the sector itself. With both identified structures (ASCS and ACCS) cooperation is classified as lacking and the structures themselves as non-functional and supportive to the sector.

Assessment data show that the legislation of one of the main mechanisms of public involvement in local and central decision-making, such as public consultation, is considered to be well known by only 19% of organizations, 28% know it well, 37% state that know little about it and 16% have no information at all.

Only half of the CSOs interviewed were invited to participate in consultation processes at local and central level (48.5%).

Consultation meetings are considered effective for only 55% of organizations whose recommendations are reflected in the draft document consulted with CSOs. Meanwhile for 45% of organizations consultations are not effective as CSO recommendations are not reflected or taken into consideration, notifications and sharing of review documents are not done or done just few days before the meeting in violation of the legal deadlines set for this procedure etc.

CSOs needs to increase participation in decision-making and policy-making processes

In the context of increasing their capacity to participate in decision-making and policy-making processes, CSOs have identified the needs listed as follows:

- ✓ increasing transparency in consulting processes; use of all means of communication, mainly online (web) by the local government (municipalities).
- ✓ involvement of civil society and stakeholders in all stages of policymaking from the initial to the implementation and monitoring stages;
- ✓ timely engagement and implementation of recommendations and suggestions given;
- ✓ considering and "utilizing" the expertise that CSOs have in certain areas mainly as service providers to vulnerable groups, by municipal representatives;
- ✓ improve coordination and enforcement of existing local government-CSO referral / coordination mechanisms.
- ✓ enhancing CSOs' advocacy and lobbying capacities, as well as for monitoring and demanding for accountability and transparency of decision makers;

✓ increasing CSOs' knowledge and capacity on the legal framework and organization of consultation processes, local and central policies and their need for expertise in effective inclusion and competition;
✓ establishing a sustainable standard of exchange of experience and information between the two sectors.
✓ strengthening cooperation within the civil society sector and other relevant stakeholders such as the business community.

VIII.   CSOs – MEDIA COOPERATION

Assessment data shows that the sector's relationship with the media mainly at the national level is still far from what civil society organizations want and intend to have. As shown in Chart 28, the local media is considered accessible to the majority of respondents, while the national media is considered in the largest proportion as low and not accessible at all.

Chart 28. CSOs access to Media

Chart 28. CSOs access to Media
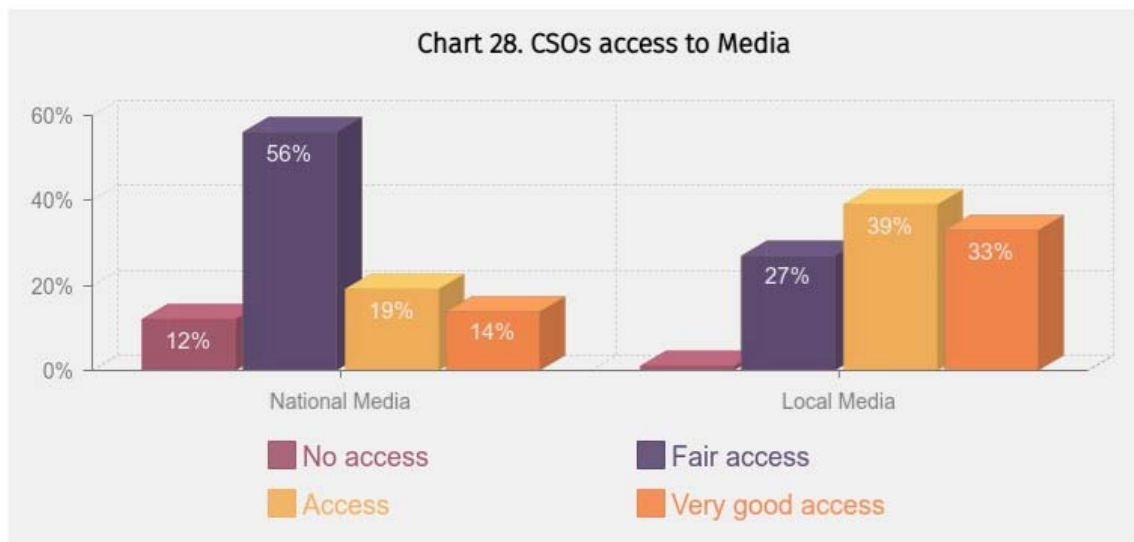
This attitude is also reflected in the communication channels and tools most used by organizations to inform and interact with the general public where the top three are: social media, specifically Facebook in 90% of the cases, the organization's own Website for 56.5% of organizations as well as local audiovisual media in 55% of cases. Magazines, meanwhile, are ranked as the least used by organizations to increase their visibility and promote their work (Chart 29).

Chart 29. Channels of communications of CSOs

Chart 29. Channels of communications of CSOs
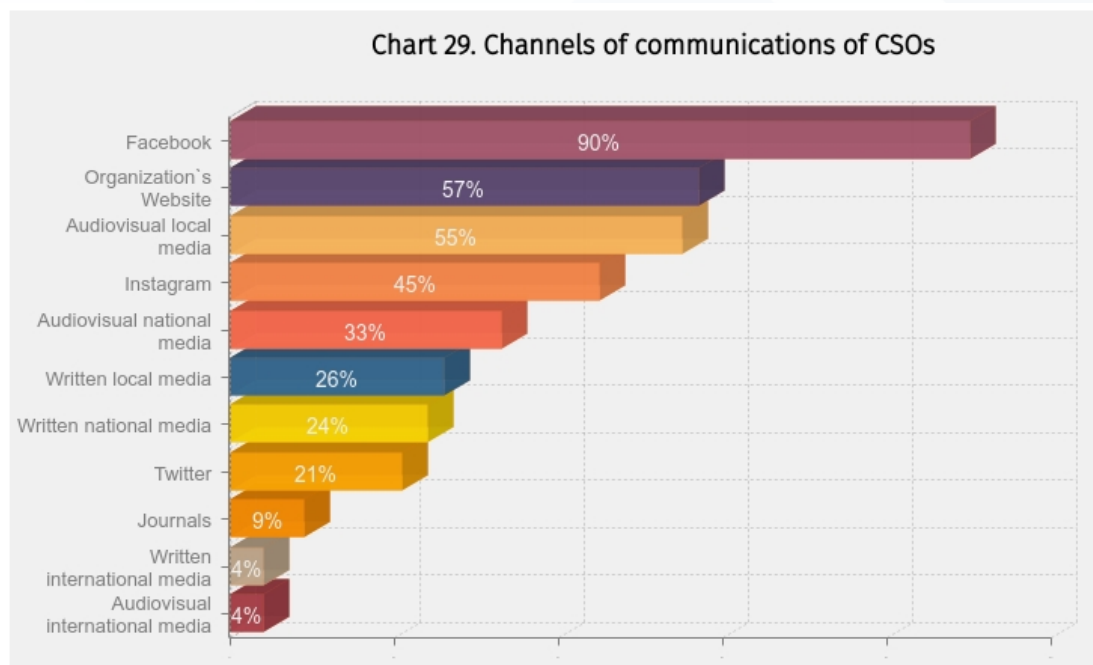
The evaluation of the relationship with the local and national media, based on the experiences of the surveyed organizations, is different and polarized. 49% of respondent organizations rate the relation with media as "good and somewhat good", "correct" and "positive", 15% as "very good" without qualifying the type of media. Meanwhile, 12% of the organizations in their ratings are divided according to the type of media where the relation with the local media is considered as good and accessible, while the national media is classified as a little accessible and distant.

In a significant number of organizations, the relationship with media is described as weak, uncooperative and difficult. Some CSOs label the media as profit oriented by showing interest and cooperation only in the case of payment.

Considering this relationship as very important not only in enhancing the visibility of the work of civil society but mainly in raising the impact and awareness of the general public and other stakeholders on the role that civil society plays for the democratization of the society, the media should be considered as an important partner and actor.

In this context, to improve the relationship between the two sectors, CSOs identify the following activities:

- ✓ establishing partnerships through the implementation of activities or projects of interest to both parties
- ✓ organizing discussion forums between the two sectors to raise media awareness and knoledge of the work and contribution of CSOs.
- ✓ periodic meetings between the two sectors to find spaces for bilateral cooperation.
- ✓ raising the issue fairly and involving as many stakeholders as possible, especially those directly affected; maintaining constant contact with the media and providing clear and reliable information.
- ✓ applying state subsidies for tariffs required by the media in relation to sector activity.
- ✓ more activities to increase social media accountability.

IX.   CSOs - PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION

The private sector is becoming increasingly important not only as one of the sources of funding and support for CSOs' activity but as a potential partner in developing models and demands for fee for services provided by CSOs, thus becoming an important factor for the sustainability of organizations.

However, the cooperation between the private sector and that of civil society, based on the data of the assessment, is still underdeveloped. As previously mentioned, the access of CSOs at the private sector and the support they get is very low. Most of CSOs part of the assessment (67%) declares they did not neither cooperated with private sector at all nor received funding from this sector.

In cases where this cooperation has existed it has been for the organization of joint activities and causes, where the business contribution has been "in kind" contribution (28%) and with funds (31%).

The assessment data shows that the business sector's effort to get to know and collaborate with non-profit organizations is low. Only 2% of organizations have had the opportunity to promote their work during events and meetings organized by the business itself, compared to meetings and events organized by the organizations themselves in 60% of the cases.

Regardless of establishment of a cooperation between sectors, 80% of the respondents state that the business sector is well-known and aware of their organization's work. Most of this knowledge was obtained during meetings and events organized by NPOs and partner organizations that facilitate the cross-sectors cooperation and also events organized by local government (Chart 30).

Chart 30. How does business get acquainted with CSOs activities?

Chart 30. How does business get acquainted with CSOs activities?

- Meetings organised by business itself: 17%
- Meetings organised by the Ministries: 24%
- Meetings organised by the Municipalities: 45%
- Meeting organised by other CSOs: 54%
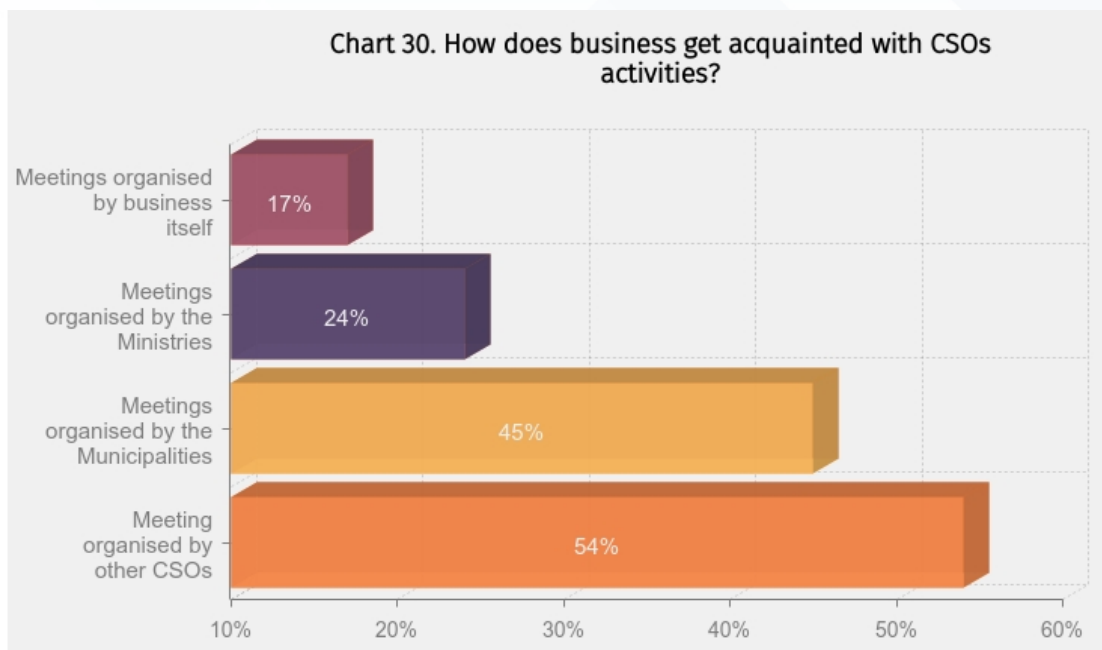
CSOs needs for capacity building to improve cooperation with the business sector

According to the interviewed CSOs, the main needs they have to strengthen their capacities and to establish and/or increase cooperation with the private sector are as follows:

- ✓ training programs to increase knowledge of existing fiscal legislation and incentives / mechanisms related to business financial support for csos;
- ✓ sharing of information and promotion of successful csos-business cooperation experiences and models in the country;
- ✓ increase of knowledge on the business sector to build partnerships with it (meetings and business to csos activities);
- ✓ assessing business needs on the services provided by csos, establishing common platforms for meeting mutual needs;
- ✓ development of philanthropy;
- ✓ cooperation in advocacy campaigns targeting the local government; organization of cross-sector roundtables for more employment of vulnerable groups in business.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the assessment of CSOs capacity and their needs, this section summarizes the conclusions from the assessment and the needs for further intervention to address the identified issues.

<u>Institutional development and organizational sustainability</u>

- ✓ **CSOs Internal policies and procedures.** More than half of the CSOs part of the assessment state that they have basic internal organizational policies and procedures, adopted by decision-making bodies, which regulate the activity of the organization. However, there is still a considerable number who do not have such procedures and who want to develop them.
- ✓ **Strategic Plan.** Only 58% of organizations have a strategic plan. Strategic planning is a key factor for the development of civil society organizations and their sustainability. It is very important but at the same time it can be very complex and difficult to accomplish especially for small organizations without much capacity. The part of CSOs that do not have such a plan clearly expresses the need for guidance and support for its drafting. Meanwhile, this need is also stated by the CSOs that have the strategic plan, as it is a basic document for the development of the organization and needs to be reviewed and developed periodically.
- ✓ **Challenges and needs in the development and organizational sustainability of CSOs.** The most challenging issues for organizations and their activities, according to CSOs, remain: (1) Lack of funding (2) Legal and fiscal framework for CSOs (3) Lack of cooperation with local and central government and non-involvement in policy making and (4) Lack of mechanisms / inability to participate in tenders for the provision of public services. Addressing these needs requires a multi-faceted intervention in: enhancing the sector's knowledge and capacity on these issues (fundraising, revenue generation, legal and fiscal framework, participation in policy making, service delivery); increased cooperation with local and central government; enhancing cooperation with business; advocating for the creation of mechanisms and incentives for CSOs.
- ✓ **Training needs.** Despite the development of the sector over the years and the creation of a long experience, the need for capacity building remains high. The biggest training needs of CSO management staff are in fundraising and income generation, strategic planning, social entrepreneurship, networking / coalition building, and fiscal legislation and financial reporting. Whereas, for CSO staff the main training needs result in topics such as: EU programmes and funding schemes, project proposal writing according to EU requirements and formats, as well as developing project proposals in general, fundraising and revenue generation as well as project management.

✓ **Partnerships and Networking.** The lack of partnerships and networking between organizations at home and abroad results as another need in the sector. Partnerships are mainly seen by CSOs in the application and implementation of joint projects within organizations with similar missions and areas of action, as well as in gaining knowledge and experience from more developed organizations, with more capacities and focusing mainly on urban areas (especially in Tirana). Lack of activities and support for networking and partnerships; the limited number of exchange programs, models and best practices; study visits that enable further advancement of CSOs etc. are some of the needs identified by CSOs. Low access and participation in regional and European networks is also a need that remains to be addressed, with a view to institutional strengthening, increasing visibility and relation with the public and other actors, and fundraising.

✓ **CSO reporting and transparency.** Transparency in the sector remains an issue that needs to be worked on by the whole sector in order to further improve it. It also directly affects the creation of trust and partnerships with other stakeholders (government, business, media) as well as the members / beneficiaries of CSOs services, and therefore also the organizational development and sustainability. Only 58% of organizations publish and share annual reports through their communication channels within the sector, stakeholders and beyond. Raising awareness and working within the sector to address this issue remains necessary in order to increase the transparency and accountability of the sector.

Financial management and sustainability

✓ **Access to funding sources for CSOs.** Access to funding sources, whether foreign or domestic donors, funding agencies, state institutions, etc., at 79% are classified as difficult. The lowest access results in the ASCS, central government, local government and business. Assessment data show that the financial viability of organizations remains one of the constant concerns of civil society organizations regardless of the field in which they operate, their years of experience or location.

✓ **CSOs as providers of paid services.** The provision of paid services to third-party by CSOs in recent years has been increasingly used by the civil society sector as one of the forms for raising and generating funds. 32% of CSOs part of the assessment has such experiences. Services offered include training courses and expertise within and outside the sector, handicrafts, coffee and catering services, tourist guides, medical services and social services. Another form of revenue generation is renting of the organization's premises to third parties as well as the establishment of social enterprises. The geographical distribution of the organizations providing these services is spread across the three regions but the largest concentration remains in the city of Tirana (40%). This model is considered unexplored by other cities in the country; further promotion of capacity outside Tirana on this issue should be promoted. CSOs that have not yet taken initiatives in this area are interested but consider the process as difficult

and challenging and lack the knowledge and capacity to develop and manage such an activity. Addressing these needs with training and assistance programs is needed.

Participation of CSOs in advocacy initiatives

- ✓ **Involvement in advocacy.** CSO involvement in advocacy turns out to be mainly as part of initiatives undertaken by a group of organizations or as part of initiatives undertaken by the organization itself. 79% of CSOs state that they have been involved in advocacy campaigns in the last 5 years. Regarding the level of advocacy and the geographic scope of the advocacy campaign, CSOs generally declare that they have conducted advocacy campaigns or become part of national and local campaigns. Despite this involvement, the number of campaigns at such levels is not very high, and mostly at the level of project activities and campaigns, rather than the sustained follow-up initiatives and/or coordinated by CSOs co-operation platforms.
- ✓ **Obsacles to involvement in advocacy.** The main obstacles identified are the difficulty of networking and getting together with other organizations; lack of financial capacity for such initiatives; and the fact that CSOs receive government funding (from local and central government).
- ✓ **The needs of CSOs for effective advocacy.** Advocacy as one of the main pillars of the work of civil society organizations in order to be effective requires effort and investment in time, human and financial resources by CSOs. CSOs identify a number of needs within their advocacy capacity and further empowerment in this regard: lack of capacity to build effective advocacy campaigns; lack of cross-sectoral cooperation and networking at home and abroad for a greater and sustainable impact; the difficulty of mobilizing citizens on issues of importance for the local communities and the country (mobilization remains low); the low level of volunteering and the disadvantaged legal and regulatory framework; lack of financial sustainability, which directly affects the lack of advocacy initiatives at local and central level.

Country's integration to the European Union and the role of civil society

- ✓ The process of the country's accession to the European Union and its significant impact on current and future political-socio-economic development requires the engagement of all stakeholders in society. Although state institutions are directly responsible for fulfilling the legal obligations throughout the EU integration process, civil society organizations, according to EU policies and programs, are considered one of the key actors directly involved in this process. 92% of CSOs consider the role of civil society and involvement in the process of the country's accession to the European Union very important and important.

- ✓ CSOs mainly see the role of civil society in the integration process mostly in informing and raising public awareness of the process, in monitoring the implementation of law and public policy throughout the negotiation process and less in providing expertise for specific areas and participation in inter-institutional working groups on EU integration.
- ✓ Only half of the CSOs part of the assessment has some knowledge of the integration process and the role of CSOs in it. Increasing knowledge in this regard is identified as a key need for CSOs in order to be able to play an active role during the negotiation process.
- ✓ Less than half of CSOs are aware of EU support programs such as IPA, regional programs and Union Programmes. Capacity building through inforation sessions and training and assistance programs in this area remains significant.

Networking / Coalitions

- ✓ CSOs are part of networks / coalitions mostly at national, regional and European level. The involvement of CSOs in networks at local level remains low.
- ✓ CSOs are mainly interested in networking and coalitions with other organizations that have the same focus of action and similar interests.
- ✓ Among the topics listed by CSOs interviewed for potential networks / coalitions are those on: protection of youth rights and their economic empowerment; protection of the environment and protected areas; amending and improving the legislation for CSOs mainly in the creation of fiscal facilities and social entrepreneurship; gender equality; integration of marginalized groups and national minorities, as well as the country's EU integration.
- ✓ Working in networks and coalitions presents many challenges and difficulties where the main remaining is lack of funding for network / coalition activity and low human resources capacities. Despite the challenges and challenges, 94% of the CSOs interviewed remain willing to join networks and coalitions if such an opportunity is offered or if the need arises.

CSOs – Local/Central Government Cooperation

- ✓ Assessment data shows that CSOs' relationship with local and central government still needs a lot of bilateral efforts to increase transparency, trust and cooperation. 52% of CSOs declare that they rarely cooperate with central government institutions, while 27% of them state that they have no cooperation at all. Concerning local government, 44% of CSOs have rare cooperation and 13% have no cooperation at all. Cooperation with state institutions at central and especially at local level continues to be determined by the degree of recognition and relationships with key administration representatives and the head of the institution.

- ✓ More than half of the surveyed organizations are not aware of strategic documents for CSO-government cooperation.
- ✓ Only 47% of CSOs are aware of the existence of institutions specifically set up for cooperation between the two sectors, among which 67% have identified the Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS), 16% the National Council for Civil Society (NCCS). Cooperation with ASCS and NCCS is classified as lacking and structures are considered as non-functional and supportive to the sector.
- ✓ A high number of CSOs don't have information on the legislation and regulatory framework for public consultation. Participation in consultation processes at local and central level remains low. Even when there are consultations, they are not considered effective as CSO recommendations are not reflected or taken into consideration, notifications and sharing of documents for review is not done at all or is done only a few days before the meeting in violation of the legal deadlines set for this procedure, etc
- ✓ In order to increase participation in decision-making and policy-making processes, it is necessary to: involve civil society and stakeholders in all stages of policy-making from the initial to the implementation and monitoring stages; their timely engagement and implementation of recommendations and suggestions given; enhancing the advocacy and lobbying capacities of CSOs, as well as monitoring and demanding accountability and transparency of decision makers; increasing the knowledge and capacity of CSOs on the legal framework and organization of consultative processes, local and central policies and their need for expertise for more effective involvement and input; strengthening cooperation within the civil society sector and other stakeholders such as the business community.

CSO-s Media Cooperation

- ✓ The sector's relationship with the media mainly at the national level is still far from what civil society organizations want and need to have. The local media is considered accessible to the majority of the respondents, while the national media is considered in the largest proportion as scarce and not accessible at all.
- ✓ The communication channels most used by organizations to inform and interact with the general public are: social media (mainly Facebook), CSOs Website and local audiovisual media.
- ✓ The relation with Media is seen as very important not only in enhancing the visibility of civil society work but mainly in enhancing the impact and awareness of the general public and other stakeholders on the role that civil society plays in democratizing society.
- ✓ To improve the relationship between the two sectors is needed: increased exchange of information between the sectors; enhancing the capacity of CSOs in communication and working with the media; creating partnerships through the implementation of joint

activities / projects; organizing joint discussion forums in order to raise the awareness and awareness of the media about the work and contribution of CSOs, etc.

CSOs - private sector cooperation

✓ The relationship between the private sector and the civil society is still underdeveloped. CSOs have low access to the private sector. Most CSOs state that they have had no cooperation with the private sector nor have received funding from it.
✓ The private sector is becoming increasingly important not only as a source of funding and support for CSO activity but as a potential partner in the development of models and offerings for paid services provided by CSOs - thus becoming an important factor for the sustainability of organizations.
✓ The main needs identified by CSOs for capacity building and establishing and developing cooperation with the private sector relationships: increasing CSOs' knowledge of the existing legislation and fiscal facilities / mechanisms related to business financial support for CSOs; creating opportunities for sector recognition and partnership development; knowledge and experience exchange of successful models of CSO-business cooperation in the country; and developing an enabling legal and regulatory framework for philanthropy development.

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