Sweden

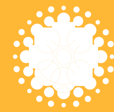
UK

Estonia

Slovakia

Russia

# 2019 Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia



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# 2019 Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia

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# PREFACE

By Kristina Smolijaninovaitė

From 2016 onwards, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF) has issued an annual Report on the State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia. Each year we study four EU countries and Russia, outline the main trends and challenges for civil society organisations (CSOs) there, solutions to those challenges and legal and political conditions. For 2019, we have chosen Sweden, which has a long history of social democracy and joined the EU in 1995, the UK, an "old" member state, which is going through Brexit at the time of writing, and Estonia and Slovakia, two "new" member states which were in the former Soviet sphere of influence and joined the EU in 2004. For their research, all country authors used available official data, interviewed representatives from between 12 to 16 CSOs and, apart from the UK, conducted a focus group to verify the findings and conclusions.

As in previous years, the Russia report shows a division in civil society between state-approved socially oriented non-profit organisations (SONPOs) supported by the federal government funds, and CSOs that challenge government actions and protect public interests. The rise of non-institutional initiatives, not mentioned in previous Annual Reports, has provided new challenges for state and formal CSOs. The most vivid cases are connected with ecological protests such as anti-rubbish protests near the settlement of Shiyes, in northern Russia, and mass protests against the refusal to register independent candidates for elections to the Moscow City Duma.

Where there are strong institutional links between CSOs and government and continuing consensus on how these should operate, as we report is the case in Estonia, CSOs continue to thrive despite challenges.

A trend of CSOs losing members in large numbers and at a somewhat high rate is a feature of the report on Sweden. Not only have numbers fallen, but members' involvement is changing from active to more passive forms, and from lasting to temporary activities. Some interviewees suggested that the younger generation is less interested in wider social and political problems and more concerned about single issues.

CSOs face a complex legal and political environment in the UK. There is no single national policy and both law and policy vary considerably between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Charity law is complicated and there are increasingly onerous and difficult to navigate regulatory requirements. For those CSOs receiving government funding, years of reducing budgets and onerous performance targets have added a further layer of pressure. Uncertainty about the Brexit deal during 2019 reflects increasing political polarisation, although apart from Northern Ireland, CSOs have largely remained silent on the Brexit question.

In many countries in this study, the political climate in which CSOs operate has deteriorated or there have been challenges from right-wing populists. For instance, in Slovakia, the murders of an investigative journalist and his fiancée in February 2018 incited mass protests around the country organised by CSOs and activists mostly under an informal initiative known as, "For a decent Slovakia". These events in Slovakia have led to lower trust of

CSOs in leading political actors, increased tensions and hate speech, and there has been a rise in populism and disinformation. However, in 2019 the newly elected first female president of Slovakia, who was previously an environmental activist and lawyer, offered hope of a positive change for CSOs and civil society in Slovakia.

The fifth issue of the Annual Report will be published at the beginning of 2021 and will feature Austria, France, Latvia and Slovenia.

# Innovative thinking and new forms of activism in challenging times: Civil society in Russia and four EU countries – Sweden, the UK, Estonia, and Slovakia

## Comparative overview

By Nicholas Acheson

## Introduction

This is the fourth report of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. It presents an update of the state of civil society in Russia and reports from four other EU countries. One of these (the United Kingdom) was in the process of leaving the EU at the time of writing, while of the other three, one (Estonia) was formerly a republic within the Soviet Union and one (Slovakia) within the Soviet Union sphere of influence as part of the then Czechoslovakia, becoming a separate country in 1993. Finally, we report on Sweden, a stable Nordic country with a long history of democratic and civil society development.

We have tried to be consistent in the use of terminology underpinned by a shared conceptual framework of what we mean by civil society. This is a complex and difficult to measure concept that embodies both a set of organisations that are independent of the state, not for private gain and based on freedom of association, and the practice of civic activism among citizens outside of their immediate families. Such activism can encompass everything from informal and formal volunteering, and philanthropic giving, to social movement organising. Both aspects can have purposes varying from leisure and recreation, the expression of humanitarian concern to arguing for social or even political change on any number of issues that are felt to be relevant or important.

One common feature of civil society is that how it appears in any particular country will at least in part be a function of the political and social traditions of that country, not to mention its form of government and administrative arrangements. The countries we report on this year are very different in all these aspects with the consequence that direct comparisons are difficult, as will become clear. Nevertheless, some shared themes do emerge from the data that reflect the uneasy state of politics in Europe.

## Context

All the countries we report on in this study share a context in which there has been a growing involvement of CSOs in welfare delivery managed through competitive processes coupled in the EU countries with a coarsening of public debate and questioning of the legitimacy of CSOs' engagement in that debate. The nature and pace of change varies. In Sweden both are present, but thus far they have had only a marginal impact on the way CSOs operate and their relations with government. In contrast, in the UK CSOs have come under considerable pressure as government has consolidated its support for civil society around contracts to deliver mandated services, and regulation has become ever more complex and demanding, making engagement in political debate more difficult. This has deepened divisions between formal CSOs employing staff to deliver services and civic activism (Glasius and Ishkanian 2015).

In Slovakia and Estonia, the relative weakness of CSOs, reflects the relatively recent redirection of both countries from communist rule to the market economy and democracy. Market pressures and the growing influence of far right political parties have affected both. In Estonia the rapid development of a sophisticated regulatory regime has aided the

resilience of CSOs. In Slovakia there is less formal certainty in relations with government and greater political pressure from the growth of the far right.

In Russia, the evidence suggests that regulatory and political pressure has helped create a division between a depolicitised group of CSOs encouraged by the state to be directly involved in various forms of welfare provision and citizen engagement through uncontentious forms of volunteering on the one hand and a set of delegitimised marginal CSOs having to find ever more inventive ways to circumvent government attempts to silence them on the other. This is reflected in a rapid growth in the extent of state aid coupled with a freezing out of foreign funding.

Since 2008, austerity-driven policy responses to the banking crisis have increased competitive pressures and reinforced division in societies (Zimmer and Pahl, 2018). The political reaction to austerity across Europe has also led to increasing xenophobia, scapegoating of immigrants and growth in the influence of right-wing populism in many European countries. This reaction has increased pressure on civil society where it seeks to express international human rights norms and has begun to reframe arguments about the role of civil society in democratic states. Under pressure from right wing populist movements, in many countries, governments have pushed back against foreign funding for CSOs (Anheier et al. 2019) making it more difficult for CSOs arguing for the application of international human rights norms to fund their activities. Together with market pressures these are creating an increasingly turbulent context.

## The state of civil society in Russia and four EU countries

The problem of measuring civil society either as a set of organisations or as the extent and nature of civic activism in both individual countries and comparing countries with one another is notoriously complicated. This affects questions of both measurement and categorisation. Countries will often have different definitions of what is being measured and there will often be different approaches to categories of different kinds of CSOs, depending on the purposes for which data has been gathered. Thus, administrative data are often inconsistent, even within individual countries as differing sections of government gather data for different reasons.

Each of the country studies reported here relies on available administrative data. Unfortunately, even where these data are extensive, as in the UK and Sweden, definitions of what is being measured and the categories used, are often incompatible. Slovakia and Estonia can draw on less extensive data, but in Russia, administrative data is more rudimentary and is not consistent across government functions.

As a result it has not proved possible to draw up useful comparisons between the five countries in this year's study using the data provided in each individual country report. In Russia the data are partial and inconsistent and in the other four countries the variability of the regulatory regimes make comparisons of data drawn up to meet regulatory requirements only possible by making heroic assumptions about the equivalence of the categories being used. While in both the UK and Sweden there is a long history of independent research to draw on, this does not apply to the same extent in either Estonia or Slovakia.

It is possible to provide some comparative indication of where the countries in this year's study stand in relation to one another using other data on both civil society as a population of organisations and as civic activism. These data are often gathered for other purposes and not all cover all five countries and should be treated with a degree of caution. Nevertheless they do provide a usable indication of the relative state of civil society in our five countries.

### Civil Society as a population of organisations

Salamon and Sokolowski's (2018) study of a combination of what they term non-profit institutions and mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises in EU countries derives a composite measure based on a variety of sources some of which are now quite old although the authors do provide a robust defence of their methodology. Their definition is close to, but not equivalent to civil society organisations as we are defining them. Mutuals and cooperatives may include organisations, such as banks and mutually owned companies, not normally considered part of civil society. With that qualification, their data on the relative economic significance of these organisations measured by their workforce as a proportion of total national employment is useful. The authors argue that measures based on workforce data are the most reliable indicator of the overall strength and importance of civil society in a form that allows comparisons between countries. Table One summarises their data for the four EU countries in this year's report. There are no usable data from Russia.

Table 1. Estimated CSO workforce in 2014, both paid and volunteer as percentage of all employment, listed by relative size

| Country | % of total national employment |
|---|---|
| Sweden | 16.7 |
| UK | 14.6 |
| Estonia | 11.7 |
| Slovakia | 7.9 |
| EU 27 + Norway | 13.2 |

Source: Salamon and Sokolowski (2018) pp76-77. Based on estimates for 2014. The authors' methodology is set out in detail in Salamon and Sokolowski (2018, pp78-79). The text is available for free download at <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-71473-8>.

Table One illustrates a pattern that the literature suggests should be the case. The gradation from Sweden reflects the openness of the political order to citizen engagement. In Sweden decades of consensus government supporting the engagement of national interest associations in policy making has left a legacy of widespread citizen activism expressed through membership of associations that are subject to little regulatory pressure.

Estonia stands out here and the comparison with Slovakia is striking. As the chapter on Estonia explains, the country was very fast out of the blocks after independence to create and then modernise a system of governance that sought to draw civil society into networks of influence, backed by formal undertakings about why and how relations with the state should be conducted. The undertakings created a clear agreement on the role and functions of civil society in the governance of the country. Both the legal framework and the practice of governing the country supported the creation of sustainable associations; registration is easy requiring the signatures of just two people. As a result for such a small country, where

before independence in 1991 there was no legal concept of an independent association, the numbers are high and closer to the CSO densities in Sweden than to Slovakia.[1]

Slovakia has almost five times the population but only just over twice as many CSOs as Estonia. While CSOs developed relatively rapidly, especially after the country's accession to the EU in 2004, our Slovakia chapter shows how CSOs often struggled to define their relationship to the state and develop an independent voice in the policy process. The state was itself much less proactive than in Estonia in creating an effective regulatory framework and providing clarity on the functions CSOs might fulfil in Slovak life. As we will see, an insecure funding base has kept Slovak CSOs small and highly reliant on volunteers. Where they use paid staff, these tend to be hired as independent contractors. Few CSOs have employees.

### Civic participation: the World Giving Index

Turning to measures of civic participation, the second dimension of civil society, we can draw on the World Giving Index. This is prepared annually by the Charities Aid Foundation and includes three measures: helping a stranger, donating money, and volunteering time. It is based on questions in the Gallup Company World View World Poll, which samples about 1000 respondents in each of 146 countries, which together represent about 95% of the world's population (CAF 2018). It provides consistent representative results within known confidence intervals. Its big advantage is in providing comparable data, but at the cost of not taking into account the impact of local economic, social and/or political factors. Conducted annually, it offers the possibility of viewing change over time. As we have already noted above, it is not the only way to measure civic engagement and will produce results that can be at variance with other measures using different methodologies. Care needs to be taken in interpreting the results, as they are very dependent on question wording. Asking people whether they volunteered in the last month is likely to give a lower figure than it would, had they been asked if they had volunteered in the last year.

The scores of the five countries for 2017 are given in Table Two.

Table 2. World Giving Index 2018[2]

| Country | Helping a stranger | Donating money | Volunteering time |
|---|---|---|---|
| Estonia | 34% | 27% | 16% |
| Russia | 44% | 21% | 11% |
| Slovakia | 32% | 31% | 22% |
| Sweden | 52% | 57% | 13% |
| UK | 63% | 68% | 33% |

1 Numbers are also dependent on how they are counted. It is important to remember that this conclusion is based on estimates.

2 The figures are the percentages of people, rounded to the nearest whole number, who responded affirmatively to the questions posed in the survey, whether they helped a stranger, donated money or volunteered time in the previous month.

In general, there is a participation gradient from UK down to Russia (although the Russians score well when it comes to helping a stranger). Civic participation is lower in all three countries that were either part of the Soviet Union or within its sphere of influence, although both Estonia and Slovakia score relatively well by these measures now. Both Sweden and the UK have long traditions of citizen engagement. In Sweden this has been expressed through mass membership of associations and the level of volunteering in what might be broadly understood as welfare services has been relatively low. This is considerably higher in the UK and it is likely that this relates to the long-standing traditions of charity and local civic action.

There appears to be little correlation between the levels of civic engagement and the numbers of CSOs. However, the measures of numbers of CSOs and the extent of civic engagement are drawn up without consideration of each other. In particular, the World Giving Index has measures of engagement that may have little practical impact on establishing and sustaining organisations.

The lack of correlation between the two is illustrated by the case of Estonia which we have shown has relatively high numbers of CSOs and we argued that this was most likely due to a regulatory regime which favoured their establishment. But this is not reflected in the findings for volunteering where the proportion of people volunteering time is considerably less than in Slovakia where there are relatively fewer organisations.

One possible explanation is suggested by the findings of UK research that there is a civic core of people who give most time and money. The people who volunteered most were also those who donated most (Mohan and Bulloch 2012). This is not picked up in the World Giving Survey where a person who volunteered once in the past month would score the same as one who volunteered every day. One explanation of the situation in Estonia, might be that the proportion of people who volunteer might be rather low, but those that do, may give it a great deal of time. Alternatively, it might be that respondents are discounting some of their civic activities as volunteering. The case of Estonia is illustrative of the truism that volunteer effort is not enough to create viable CSOs; a permissive regulatory and political environment is also necessary.

## Legal and regulatory regimes

In Europe there has been a trend of ever more onerous regulatory pressures making it more difficult for CSOs to sustain their freedom of action. Evidence of the double pressure of regulation through competitive funding regimes and tightening of the space for CSOs to express dissenting views or influence policy debates through advocacy activities is seen in all four of the EU countries in this year's report. But it varies greatly as we discuss in greater detail below from hardly at all in Sweden to considerably in both Slovakia and the UK. In Russia continuing efforts by the state to both encourage CSOs to take on welfare services and close down others that espouse human rights put it into a rather different category.

Two comparative indices on the relative supportiveness of legal and regulatory regimes are available. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index is a measure of the extent to which countries enable an open civic space, that is to say one that is relatively free from restrictive legislative and regulatory pressure. It publishes an annual 'State of Civil Society' report based on qualitative and quantitative data covering 187 countries worldwide. Based on qualitative

data drawn from informants in each country, the Index categorises countries by the extent to which they are: open; narrowed; obstructed; repressed; or closed. The five countries in our study were rated in the 2019 report as follows: Estonia and Sweden, open; Slovakia and the UK, narrowed; Russia, repressed (https://monitor.civicus.org/govtindexes/). Its 2019 report focuses on everyday issues bringing people on to the street; challenging exclusion and claiming rights; the state of democracy; and civil society at the international level. (https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2019/state-of-civil-society-report-2019_executive-summary.pdf).

The evidence of the country studies in this report is supportive of this categorisation. Both regulatory and legal pressures are greater in the UK and Slovakia than in Estonia and especially Sweden. In Russia legal recognition of freedom of association to an extent depends on the judgement of state agents of the purposes towards which that freedom is exercised. Such judgements can be variable and the legal framework within which they are made often changing.

The other Index is the USAID Sustainability Index. It excludes the UK and Sweden but includes the post Communist Slovakia, Estonia and Russia. The Index is compiled by an expert panel in each country who are asked to score across seven dimensions including legal environment and public image (https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-reports). The process is iterative and consensual. While not restricted to legal and regulatory matters alone, it nevertheless provides a valid measure of the degree to which they support the development of civil society.

The 2018 Index shows that in both Estonia and Slovakia the sustainability of civil society is generally enhanced, with Estonia scoring higher than Slovakia across all the dimensions. Both appeared stable between 2016 and 2018. The Index notes the complex nature of the situation in Russia, with depoliticised groups in areas such as welfare and sports experiencing improving levels of state support, while at the same time the legal regime became more complex, providing more avenues for the state to crack down on CSOs expressing opposition to or dissent from the state.

Each country study in this report contains a narrative of the legal and regulatory regime and reports on the challenges experienced by CSOs. Not surprisingly, in general the more restrictive the legal regime, the more it features as problematic.

## Challenges

All the country studies in this report used a common methodology. A purposive sample of between 12 and 16 civil society leaders were interviewed and asked about the challenges they faced and solutions they have used to address these challenges. Apart from the UK, each conducted a focus group of experts comprising civil society leaders, relevant government representatives and scholars in various combinations. The following two sections of this paper are based on the analysis of the results in each of the country studies.

The challenges can be thematically organised around the following: changes in the social basis of civil society; relations with government and the welfare state; and changes in the political climate.



### Changes in the social basis of civil society

The country data point to a profound change that cuts across Europe in the way that citizens engage with social structures. These are reflected in the ways that people relate to CSOs through membership and volunteering and in the use of social media to drive civic activism. A steady decline in membership is identified as a substantial issue in Sweden. Survey research cited in the UK study suggests that it is also a concern there, which is echoed by those organisations interviewed predominantly financed by membership fees. The issue is also beginning to impact Estonia. Membership fees can be an important source of income, but membership is also important for legitimacy not to mention time and work. Swedish interviewees referred to the challenges this created for the way that they worked. In Estonia interviewees expressed some concern about the direction in which the changes could be driving them.

Underlying the specific challenge of membership decline is a profound change in the ways that individuals volunteer. The Swedish interviewees referred to the shift from active to more passive forms of involvement, from long term commitment to more temporary activities and more individually tailored causes. Relationships between people and causes are frequently mediated through social media, one of whose effects has been to enable individuals to curate a public image. The phenomenon of "slactivism", half-hearted activism where clicking on a "Like" on Facebook substitutes for action and may achieve little other than the clicker feeling better about themselves and promoting a favourable image among their followers, is an easy way of being engaged without actually doing much.

Estonian interviewees expressed concern about the difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers as well as membership decline. As people's expectations of the volunteer experience changed, CSOs were struggling to adapt their strategies. One of the interviews expressed a perhaps rather extreme view that the switch from membership to episodic volunteering was the worst thing that had happened to Estonian civil society.

A more transactional approach to engagement is also evident in Slovakia where interviewees noted the emphasis on CV building among younger people who often disengage as they go on to give greater priority to professional and family commitments.

As the UK chapter makes clear, although CSOs have become important suppliers of government funded welfare, many are reliant on membership fee income and other forms of membership support. As suggested by recent survey data as well as interviews with small membership-based organisations, difficulties in recruiting and retaining membership have become an increasing worry as a result. As with Sweden, the issue has become closely tied to sustaining legitimacy in an increasing critical climate of public opinion for the same reason. High membership is an easily understood measure of public support.

Membership associations in Russia are less prevalent. As a consequence the rise in popularity of episodic volunteering in the form of environmental clean-ups and event volunteering has not been identified as a challenge in the same way (the contrast with Estonia is particularly interesting) and membership has never had the same status as a source of CSO legitimacy.

## Resources and relations with government and the welfare state

The story in each of the four EU country case studies is different, but all have had to respond to challenges posed by ongoing changes in both the extent of state welfare and the processes whereby the state relates to CSOs in their service provision function.

This is cited as the most pressing challenge by the majority of organisations interviewed in the UK, where the switch from government grants for general running costs has been particularly notable.[3] They suggest that high levels of dependency on these government funds leaves them vulnerable to increasingly onerous market pressure as state funders apply open tendering for contracts in which private for profit operators can also compete. Substantial reductions in state budgets since 2008 have also exerted downward pressure on prices leaving CSOs struggling to manage within the budgets available.

In Slovakia public funding has been rising consistently year on year, but it tends to be unstable, project directed and short term in each instance. Rather than increasing the security and stability of CSOs, it has tended to leave them more reliant on uncertain funding streams that are insufficient to recruit staff on other than a casual basis. The interviewees suggested that a consequence has been to make it very hard for CSOs to set a strategic direction and stick to it. Instead they must tailor their programmes to what they think may be funded. They have the challenge of positioning themselves in a context where expectations of CSOs' role in publicly funded welfare provision are not sufficiently well articulated.

Even where there has been a greater consensus over the role of CSOs, as in Estonia, the rise in the use of competitive tendering and contracts with onerous performance clauses is destabilising relations with government and undermining the ability of CSOs to cooperate with one another. In Slovakia, Estonia and especially in the UK, the increasing reliance on contract income as the basis of state support is creating divisions between those organisations able to negotiate the market and those, usually smaller, left out of the process as they lack the capacity or scale to compete. One consequence reported in Estonia has been pressure for organisations to grow and to professionalise their leadership. In doing so they create barriers to volunteer involvement and undermine their membership base.

A further problem has been the way that CSOs have found themselves having to respond to needs that are unmet by the state, often as a result of restrictions on social security entitlements. This has been the case even in Sweden, where traditionally CSOs have not been involved in welfare provision. One interviewee reported in the Swedish case study, referred to being involved in mental health support services for the first time as a result of changes to the entitlements of mental health patients.

## Changes in the political climate

There has been a general polarisation of political opinion across the EU and where far right parties have achieved even at least some influence over public debate, these divisions have undermined the legitimacy of some CSOs, while validating others. The evidence reported in each of the four EU countries on which we report is varied and complex.

3 Most CSOs in the UK are small and do not receive government funding, which overall accounts for just over 31% of all income of UK CSOs, <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/profile/#income-sources>.

In Sweden where the impact has been least among the four countries, it has nevertheless particularly affected CSOs working on LGBT issues and organisations working with homeless people, who are often migrants. It has become more difficult to raise funds against a background of hostile public opinion. One feature of the influence of far right parties has been a politicisation of culture. Thus in Sweden, CSOs concerned with the preservation of local traditions and history through cultural activities have found themselves being recruited into narratives promoted by right wing populists that seek to contrast "homely" Swedishness with rootless liberal globalisation. Organisations that are primarily expressive and social in function have become part of a wider political debate about the meaning of Swedish identity.

The change in tone has altered the basis on which some organisations had come to rely on for their legitimacy in public life. Although excluded from government, far right wing political parties have influenced the tenor of public debate to the extent that CSOs have had to work harder to secure their legitimacy.

Political language in the UK has coarsened considerably, especially around Brexit, although there is little evidence of a direct impact on CSOs. For many interviewees the consequences of the UK leaving the EU are mainly associated with potential problems in accessing funding. In Northern Ireland, where EU funding has been particularly important and where some CSOs work across the international border with the Republic of Ireland, a coalition of CSOs has joined business and farming interests in warning of the dangers of a no deal Brexit.

Pressure on lobbying activities has been through direct legislation, restricting CSOs on what they can say over election periods, but also through the government's use of funding by means of contracts where organisations can self-censor to be seen as a reliable partner and through no lobbying clauses. There is now a great deal of consistent evidence that such restrictions have impacted on the ability of CSOs to conduct their affairs freely (Milbourne 2013; Milbourne and Murray 2018).

In Estonia the far right party, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia, is now part of a coalition government. The interviewees reflected on how this has affected the legitimacy of their organisations. CSOs working in the area of human rights have suggested that paradoxically, it has strengthened their claims to legitimacy among that portion of the population that would be supportive of their work because, being under attack, the need seems greater. So far, however, the supportive legal framework for CSOs has remained intact.

Russia presents as an outlier to these trends. In the four EU countries in this year's study, the challenges have arisen through pressures on the idea of civil society as a sphere with its own source of legitimacy, independent of the state, that contributes to good democratic government and social order. In Russia, although the situation is complex, the idea of an independent civil society as a good in itself has never applied in the same way. There is a grey area in that we report evidence that around a fifth of the population in Moscow is involved in informal associations at local level (informal associations exist elsewhere in Russia although we lack evidence about their make-up and activities). In Russia as a whole about a third of the population has signed online petitions.

But in effect, there are two civil societies, one that provides sports and welfare services and approved forms of volunteering that our evidence shows gets substantial state support, particularly through a well managed Presidential Grants Fund, and the other concerned with

issues of minority rights and non-approved activities subject to continued state pressure aimed to discredit and undermine their right even to exist (USAID 2018). The relatively good management of the Presidential Grants Fund cuts both ways, of course, as it manages exclusion as well as inclusion, delegitimising some while offering legitimacy and support to others. And as our Russia chapter makes clear, as a consequence, the split between 'good' and 'bad' organisations can appear within specific issues such as the environment and housing as well as between kinds of organisation.

The crucial pressure point is the political control of CSO activity. An interviewee in our Russian research suggested that the nature of the pressure and responses to it are changing as a new generation of younger people are increasingly engaging in civic action, using social media in inventive ways to circumvent restrictions on their activities, turning their backs on more securely funded CSOs. The gap, also observed in the UK, between CSOs organised to deliver welfare services and grassroots activism is widening and our evidence suggests that relations have become more difficult to manage.

The Russian government has long sought to restrict access to foreign funding. This has become a wider theme internationally (Anheier et al. 2019), but the restrictions around receiving foreign donations and the negative consequences of doing so mean that in practice very few CSOs are now able or willing to risk it. In addition, our Russian chapter reports that the state has resorted to other means of control as well. It notes that among other methods it has employed are imposing exemplary fines in the hope that inability to pay will close down CSOs and the use of agents provocateurs to stir up trouble at demonstrations.

Slovakia falls somewhere between Russia and other countries in this year's study. Protected by laws that guarantee their right to exist and freedom of assembly, CSOs there are nevertheless struggling to maintain a collective sense of who they are. As society has polarised, CSOs concerned with LGBT and other rights issues have come under sustained political pressure and this has opened a split between them and other more conservative elements in civil society. Furthermore, the pressure on civil society has increased as mainstream parties in the government coalition have begun adopting narratives that had been the preserve of far right parties, such as labelling CSOs as "Soros agents wanting to destabilise the country".

The situation remains fluid however. Events in 2018 in the aftermath of the murder of a journalist and his partner were a low point. CSOs involved in the mass demonstrations that followed the murders were depicted as foreign agents who tried to organise a coup. But in 2019, a new President of Slovakia, Zuzana Čaputová, was elected whose background was in environmental CSOs and who had come to national prominence in the 2018 protests.

The challenges facing civil society in Europe and Russia are substantial, threatening to divide it into groups competing for the right to be heard and for resources, reflecting widening divisions in society as a whole. The ways that people engage are changing, challenging traditional models of volunteering. CSOs are drawn into providing direct services both through outsourcing by the state or simply because they find themselves filling gaps in an increasingly threadbare welfare state. At the same time, the rise in right wing populism and a pushback in many countries against international human rights norms, are creating political pressures and closing off civic space.



## Civil Society responding to the challenges

In the face of these challenges the evidence from our country studies shows a surprising uniformity in approach in the four EU countries. The evidence suggests some inventive practice, but in general it falls into three categories: first, CSOs are trying to achieve more control over their income streams, most commonly by monetising some of their activities and selling them for a fee. The trend towards this social enterprise model is widespread, most evident in the UK and Slovakia, but there is also clear evidence of the trend in Estonia. It is least evident in Sweden where there appears to be little pressure on CSOs to change. Secondly, building partnerships, or trying to strengthen those that already exist, is a widespread response to both financial and political pressure. Third, CSOs are attempting to address decline in membership both by centralising and professionalising their structures and by seeking to make their activities more open and accessible.

These themes are not uniformly applied. In Slovakia and the UK, where the pressures over uncertain state support are greatest, there is most enthusiasm for developing a social enterprise approach to sustaining an independent source of funds. In Estonia, where state funding remains relatively low, the evidence of a rise in social enterprise suggests that the trend may also be driven by a felt need among CSOs to retain control over income streams and guard their independence. A rise in donations also reflects similar concerns.

CSOs are centralising and professionalising in order to sustain and if possible raise their capacity as a response to both changes in volunteering and political pressures. New ways of working are being devised to counter declines in the availability of volunteer labour and, as membership falls, secure alternative forms of legitimacy. In Estonia especially, the evidence suggests that the trend towards greater professionalism is being accompanied by greater emphasis on forging stronger partnerships both with local government and with their social base.

All four EU case studies share the perspective that CSOs have sufficient agency to forge their own responses. Out of the four countries, Slovakia has experienced most political pressure and where relatively speaking CSOs are weakest, the evidence we have shows that they still have the capacity to make changes in their own interests without reference to the state or other bodies. In other words, they continue to operate in an environment where their agency is protected both in law and in administrative practice. The evidence suggests that in the face of the challenges, CSOs are proving quite robust.

In Russia there is a similar trend towards greater professionalism and similar concerns with capacity prompted by increasing demands on CSOs to deliver services and support volunteering. But the legal context is complex, ever changing, subject to political manipulation and is designed to drive a wedge between apolitical sporting and welfare CSOs and those that seek to channel disagreement and dissent from government policies. CSOs have relatively little agency in setting their own direction without worrying that they are falling foul of the state.

As a result, innovation in civic action tends to be spontaneous and mobilised through social media. The evidence in the Russia report suggests three interesting aspects. First, that younger people are driving the rise in activism and secondly much has a focus on environmental and social issues that quickly become political as the state is slow to respond

to the underlying issues. Third is constant innovation to circumvent attempts by the state to control and curtail unwelcome activity. This might be through the use of play to change the narrative over demonstrations, the use of crowd funding to raise the funds needed to meet exemplary fines, and the use of social media to raise awareness and organise.

## Conclusions

Zimmer and Pahl (2018) identify two significant pressures on civil society in Europe. First, the austerity responses to the economic crisis of 2008/09 reducing state budgets have combined with deepening competitive pressures on CSOs for the resources that are available as the commodification of welfare increasingly favours private for-profit companies. Second, they note the way that social processes of individuation are undermining the social basis of civil society as traditional and taken for granted forms of social solidarity are replaced by more transactional and episodic forms of social engagement, frequently mediated by social media. Zimmer and Pahl (ibid.) argue that this is a particular challenge because of the history of civil society in Europe and the relative importance of membership based on taken for granted social identities.

Their analysis resonates with the evidence of this year's EU-Russia State of Civil Society report. We show how in each of the five countries CSOs are under pressure across both these dimensions to varying degrees. As a quasi-democracy and statist regime, Russia stands slightly apart from the analysis of the four EU countries. The strict division between 'insider' non-political civil society and 'outsider' political civil society means there is no common set of pressures and little in the way of common response.

In the UK intense regulatory pressure, restrictions on lobbying and advocacy activities and deep social divisions, are deepening a divide between grassroots action and the "charity as business" model that is becoming dominant among those CSOs providing welfare services. Declining membership is more of a problem in Sweden (although in the UK it is also a pressure point) and is an emerging problem in Estonia. In Slovakia, state funding for CSOs is increasing, but the way it is administered is very destabilising making longer term planning difficult and keeping CSOs small and underdeveloped.

Our evidence also shows the impact of the growth of far right populism in Europe. Geopolitics plays a part here. Slovakia with Hungary and Poland as near neighbours seems at greater risk than Estonia, which is geographically close to Scandinavia. But each of our four EU countries has its own version of a process that is serving to undermine trust in government and its capacity to address social problems while at the same time raising questions over the legitimacy of CSOs.

All bad? Not quite. Our four EU country reports focus on the responses of CSOs to these pressures, which can perhaps be summarised as attempting to increase capacity by widening revenue sources, and in some cases centralising and becoming more professional, while at the same time seeking new ways to secure their legitimacy. These responses point to organisation survival mechanisms and the continued growth in their relative importance of CSOs to national economies across Europe suggests that these strategies are working (Salamon and Sokolowski 2018). But it is only part of the story of renewal or resilience of civil society.

If we shift our lens on civil society from a population of organisations, to a form of civic action a somewhat different picture emerges. And we need to turn to our report from Russia to get a sense of what it looks like in Europe. The rapid growth in event volunteering in Russia is emblematic of wider social processes in Europe. Of greater interest perhaps, is evidence in Russia that because CSOs cannot freely operate as channels of communication between citizens and the state, action is moving elsewhere. The evidence suggests that young people in particular are looking for alternative ways of organising through social media and when combined with a topic with wide resonance can trigger significant resistance to state policy, especially on environmental issues.

The example cited of mass action against plans to dump municipal rubbish from Moscow in the taiga close to Arkhangelsk is particularly instructive. Here, both the issue of environmental degradation and mass spontaneous action organised through social media with little reference to existing CSOs illustrate three fundamental aspects of contemporary citizen action.

First is the prominence of the environment as an issue throughout Europe, including Russia, capable of mobilising a mass of people. Second, that it is in part motivated by local reaction to decisions taken by seemingly remote and inaccessible bureaucracies adversely affecting local lives. And third, it involves a form of civic action that largely bypasses existing CSOs and their structures and is often led by young people, as with the schools strike movement, Fridays for Future. Ironically, perhaps, given the anxieties of Swedish CSOs about falling membership, this had its origins in Sweden. It neatly illustrates both the profound change in the way people organise their responses to social and political challenges, and that this change does not necessarily mean a reduction in civic engagement.

The evidence from our country studies and these hints of emerging trends support the view that civil society across Europe is changing in fundamental ways. The social structures underpinning civil society are shifting, creating new crises in legitimacy. Existing CSOs can struggle to adapt as the focus of contention changes and new forms of CSO emerge.

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# Sweden


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# Sweden: Minor challenges and even smaller solutions

By Johan Vamstad

## Civil society overview

### Historical context

Swedish civil society has long been characterised by what Salamon, Sokolowski and Haddock (2017) describe as the Social Democratic Pattern. This refers to countries with a centralised and unitary government, a high level of civil society mobilisation, and a considerable degree of cultural and religious homogeneity. Sweden fits this model for historical reasons which date back to the social origins of the country.

Much of the population of Sweden has had political representation at the highest level of government for centuries. This has created a basic level of trust in the central state and a relatively high level of social and economic equality. Thus, civil society has not been fractured into class or other interests in a way that has created a challenge to the state. Instead, popular movements and mass membership organisations have usually had a constructive relationship with government and ultimately played an important role in the democratic governance of the country.

Sweden's strong cultural and religious homogeneity has also had an impact on civil society. Responsibility for essential services such as education and welfare provision has not been devolved to various societal actors. Instead, Swedes have trusted the state and each other enough to agree to a system of high taxation in return for common services managed and provided by the public sector. This differs from other countries, such as Germany or the Netherlands, where cultural and religious divides have produced a civil society with large welfare organisations using public funding to provide services for different groups. Instead, CSOs in Sweden are primarily focused on issues such as lifestyle, leisure and identity (Selle et al. 2018).

### Civil society in numbers

Sweden has almost 251,000 CSOs of varying sizes and interests. Only 95,000 of these are registered with the tax authorities as being economically active. This means that the remaining 156,000 are typically small organisations with little or no turnover, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Types of civil society organisations in Sweden

| Organisation type | Number of organisations | Number of economically active organisations |
|---|---|---|
| Housing and community development | 72,175 | 33,213 |
| Recreation and culture | 65,162 | 24,459 |
| Public opinion and politics | 23,560 | 7029 |
| Religion | 8526 | 3484 |
| Industry and trade organizations/unions | 7494 | 3355 |
| Social welfare | 7145 | 3643 |
| Education and research | 6548 | 4199 |
| Distributing foundations | 4255 | 3484 |
| Environment and animal protection | 2005 | 737 |
| Health | 360 | 216 |
| International work | 350 | 135 |
| Other | 53,022 | 10,749 |
| **Total** | **250,602** | **94,892** |

Source: Statistics Sweden 2018

The high number of housing organisations is explained by a common form of home ownership in Sweden. Instead of owning their own residence directly, most people have a share in an association which owns the apartment building. The recreation and culture category includes sports organisations, which have more members than any other type of group.

In total, these organisations have 32 million members. This means that every man, woman and child of Sweden's 10.2 million population is on average a member of three organisations. Many of these memberships are passive. In a national survey 53% of respondents claimed that they had performed voluntary work of some sort in the preceding twelve months. This number has been relatively stable over six surveys covering 27 years (von Essen, Jegermalm and Svedberg 2015). Table 2 shows the percentage of people aged 16 to 74 who have been involved in a CSO at least once over the previous twelve months.

Table 2. Voluntary work per category

| Organisational field | Percentage of adults |
|---|---|
| Sports | 32 |
| Social welfare | 24 |
| Housing | 22 |
| Leisure | 22 |
| Interests and unions | 22 |
| Religious | 12 |
| Culture | 11 |
| Social movements and political | 9 |
| Cooperatives | 2 |
| Other | 7 |

Source: von Essen, Jegermalm and Svedberg 2015



These figures refer to involvement in CSOs usually through unpaid voluntary work. Sweden also has a relatively high level of civic involvement outside such organisations. For example, the same survey showed that 41% of the respondents regularly performed informal help for someone outside their own household such as grocery shopping, housework or transportation (von Essen et al. 2015). This finding is important since it has been claimed that the Swedish welfare state crowds out such informal help, making citizens passive and less civic. This is clearly not the case. As these surveys suggest, there is a high level of active involvement in both formal and informal sectors of Swedish civil society.

## The economic dimension

Swedish civil society is traditionally based on unpaid voluntary work but it is nonetheless still significant in economic terms. In 2016 alone, Swedish CSOs had combined revenues of 13.25 billion Euros as can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Sources of revenue for Swedish civil society organisations, using the 2016 exchange rate

| Type of revenue | Revenue in millions of Euros |
|---|---|
| Contributions from and sales to the public sector | 4,450 |
| Sales of goods and services (not to public sector) | 3,971 |
| Membership fees | 2,440 |
| Donations and transfers from public (not from public sector) | 2,252 |
| Other | 133 |
| **Total** | **13,247** |

Source: Statistics Sweden 2018

These revenues highlight the economic significance of CSOs in Sweden. However, it is harder to calculate the economic contributions made by these organisations since most of their work is unpaid and is therefore not incorporated in wider accounts. A government study carried out in 2014 concluded that 3,750,000 people provided 676 million working hours at a total value of 14.6 billion Euros (Segnestam Larsson and Wagndal 2018). This is the equivalent of 3.32% of Swedish GDP and a similar study in 2016 came to the figure of 14.5 billion Euros or 3.1% of GDP (Segnestam Larsson and Wagndal 2018; Statistics Sweden 2018b). The 2016 report also showed that the total economic output of Swedish civil society was 25 billion Euros, of which 3.5 billion Euros were payments from the public sector (Statistics Sweden 2018b). In 2016 there were 2,446 CSOs contracted to perform services for state, regional and local governments in the education and health and social welfare sectors. This makes up 21% of the total number of providers but only about 3% of the total volume of welfare services (Statistics Sweden 2018b).

There are close to 190,000 people who are professionally employed in Swedish CSOs, as can be seen below in Table 4.

Table 4. Professional employees and gender distribution

| Organisation type | Total | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education and research | 37,698 | 27,465 | 10,233 |
| Religion | 31,892 | 18,537 | 13,355 |
| Recreation and culture | 30,212 | 13,218 | 16,994 |
| Social welfare | 24,132 | 17,454 | 6678 |
| Housing and community development | 14,305 | 5867 | 8438 |
| Public opinion and politics | 11,615 | 7931 | 3684 |
| Industry and trade organisations/unions | 10,803 | 6051 | 4752 |
| Health | 5047 | 3899 | 1148 |
| Distributing foundations | 2900 | 1723 | 1177 |
| International work | 2513 | 1657 | 856 |
| Environment and animal protection | 1231 | 755 | 476 |
| Other | 17,359 | 8566 | 8793 |
| **Total** | **189,707** | **113,123** | **76,584** |

Source: Statistics Sweden 2018

Among the largest employers are education and research organisations, which usually require a sizeable cohort of professional staff, and the Church of Sweden, which is the former state church with many parishes, churches and material assets. Swedish CSOs paid these 189,707 employees a total of 77 billion Swedish kroner, including social security compensation.

### Conclusion overview

Overall, Swedish civil society still conforms to the social democratic pattern, mentioned above. There are a large number of CSOs with members providing mainly unpaid voluntary work. They still play a relatively small role in welfare service provision. The sheer size of the sector makes it economically significant, despite the relatively low level of professionalisation and dependence on volunteers.

## Legal framework and political conditions

### Political conditions for civil society in Sweden

Swedish democracy is firmly rooted in the tradition of the popular movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The labour movement was especially influential and it was the alliance between organised labour and agriculture that paved the way for more than four decades of social democratic governments from 1932 to 1976. The labour movement was a model for other, similar, organisations such as the temperance movement and also for large membership associations representing the interests of groups such as pensioners, patients or young people (Rothstein and Trägårdh 2007). In turn, this model formed the Swedish version of corporatism, in which federal organisations channelled the will of their many members directly into the political system at the highest, legislative level.

In recent years changes in both civil society and government have weakened this system considerably, but some of the basic structures remain. Civil society has played an important role in the politics and democracy of Sweden even though the popular movements that helped to establish this system have not always been considered as, or at least called, civil society. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that the term civil society (*Civilsamhälle*) was in widespread use in Sweden. One important reason for this is that the term was at odds with how politicians viewed Swedish politics. They saw civil society as something other than the established political system and different from the old popular movements which had played a role in encouraging mass participation in democracy.

However, the term civil society has now come to be used across the political spectrum and it is generally considered as something positive, representing both the rejuvenating force of voluntary initiatives and the long tradition of membership organisations upon which Swedish democracy is founded.

### Legal framework

There are few laws regulating civil society in Sweden. There is, of course, corporate law that regulates how organisations are managed while the right to organise is established in the Basic Laws of Sweden. These aside, there are few restrictions on CSOs. Furthermore, there are no requirements for a CSO to be registered although they can choose to do so with the Swedish Tax Agency. This makes it easier to operate as an economic entity and they can also register with the Swedish Companies Registration Office to protect their trademark. Both processes are easy, quick and free of charge. There are no restrictions on receiving funding from abroad, even for political parties, and the only restrictions on sending money abroad are for those associated with funding for terrorist organisations. In short, Sweden compares favourably with other countries when it comes to freedom of association.

### Recent political developments

In the last ten years there have been several legal and political developments aimed at clarifying, formalising and facilitating the role of CSOs in Sweden. Governments on both the political left and the right have stressed the importance of civil society for democracy and welfare services but typically with little detail about what that means in practice. A 2008 agreement involving central government, local authorities and CSOs was the first effort to give those groups a more formal role in a welfare state which had previously been characterised by a large public sector. The agreement was replaced in 2018 by what is known as the National Agency for Dialogue between Government and Civil Society, which will further integrate welfare efforts in the public sector and civil society. These developments have emphasised the role of CSOs as service providers, which is a shift from the more traditional view of them as interest groups. However, some have pointed out that this arrangement has drawbacks as these organisations may lose some of the influence they currently have as interest groups (Reuter, Wijkström and von Essen 2012, Vamstad and von Essen 2013).

A recent government commission presented a lengthy report on how to strengthen Swedish civil society (SOU 2016:13). It suggested several changes in laws and policy that would "make it easier for CSOs to conduct their business, develop and thus contribute to democracy, welfare, public health, unity and social cohesion." (SOU 2016:13, 19) It contained proposals for reforms and legislation in a wide range of areas, from changes in competition law and public procurement, to guidelines on how public agencies can better serve CSOs.

In 2018 the government submitted a policy brief (*Regeringens skrivelse*) to parliament stating the political reforms it had undertaken over the previous four years to support civil society and to provide more stable long-term conditions for CSOs (Skr. 2017/2018: 246). They pointed to new methods and communication channels for dialogue and interaction,

more research and knowledge dissemination, greater long-term funding alternatives and a series of changes in how civil servants interact with CSOs (Skr. 2017/2018: 246). The outcome of these reforms is still unclear. However, the fact that they were initiated by a government led by the Social Democratic Party, which has traditionally favoured the public sector, suggests that these policies have broad political support in Sweden.

## Challenges: Trouble in paradise?

Mainstream political support combined with the strong tradition of civic engagement has created relatively favourable conditions for Swedish CSOs (Skov Henriksen, Strømsnes and Svedberg 2018). This has been enhanced by the current legal framework. The interviews for this study largely confirm this positive outlook. However, there are challenges facing the sector. Representatives from 16 Swedish CSOs, both large and small, shared their stories of current difficulties and these were relatively consistent despite the differences between the organisations. There were three main challenges - declining and shifting resources, relations with the government and the welfare state, and issues related to changes in the political climate.

### Declining and shifting resources

It is an established axiom among Swedish CSOs that their greatest resource is their membership. However, CSOs are now losing members in large numbers in what may be an indication of a broader shift in Swedish civil society (Vamstad and Karlsson 2019). Members are an especially treasured resource for the traditional popular mass movement organisations. Yet, these are the ones which are losing the greatest number of members. There is, perhaps, no better example of this than the largest temperance movement in Sweden. Their Secretary General confirms that this is one of the organisation's main problems:

> "one of the challenges that we have, that has been going on for a long time, is that we have been losing members." (Interview SE 5)

At one time this organisation had hundreds of thousands of members but now membership has fallen to just 25,000 people. This loss has not had an economic impact since the organisation is largely funded by a successful lottery. However, the legitimacy of the organisation as an influential voice in public discourse on alcohol and drugs rests on a large cadre of members (Interview SE5). This has made the organisation determined to recruit new members and they frequently do so successfully. The problem is that membership numbers are dropping off at an even higher pace (Interview SE5). This is because their members are relatively old, which is a common problem for many traditional organisations. One of the two large organisations representing pensioners in Sweden still has 330,000 members but their numbers are also declining as the older generation, for whom organising in popular mass movements came more naturally, is replaced by a younger one with more changeable attitudes towards membership (Interview SE1). Their Head of Policy Issues argues that the organisation is partly at the mercy of general trends in civic engagement:

> "it is partly about what you do as an organisation but also about the surrounding society, the degree to which people in general want to organise in this type of association." (Interview SE1)



It is the generation of millennials that is identified by most as the real challenge to stable membership numbers. For example, a national gaming organisation with 88% of members under the age of 26 has seen numbers nearly halve from 100,000 to 54,000 members (Interview SE4). Traditional organisations, like Sweden's largest aid organisation, have recognised that their traditional membership model is challenged as the younger generation choose to channel their civic engagement in new and often more temporary ways. As their representative observed:

> "voluntary involvement is as great as it ever was, but people do not necessarily get involved through [organisations like] the Red Cross [...] the clearer we can make a case for need, the easier it is to find volunteers, but when we do, we find volunteers who want to do something just for a distinct target group." (Interview SE 11)

Members provide funding and political legitimacy but, more importantly for many organisations, time and work. It is therefore a challenge that involvement is shifting from active to more passive forms, from lasting to more temporary activities, and from collective to more individual causes. The aid organisation is responding to these developments by offering involvement opportunities for non-members such as single volunteer assignments and loyal donor programmes. However, it is still challenged by declining interest in voluntary leadership positions (Interview SE11). The chairperson of a large rights organisation for people with disabilities, argued that these changes were partly due to the growing idea of individualisation. People were less interested in broad social and political change and more concerned about single issues as well as personal representation (Interview SE6). As the chairperson noted:

> "previously, people could join to change society but today they are often more interested in seeking support to challenge decisions on welfare benefits." (Interview SE6)

Falling membership numbers and a declining interest in some aspects of voluntary work are not the only challenges for Swedish CSOs. Those more dependent on government grants are also challenged by fluctuations in public funding. An umbrella association representing 140 member organisations which run women's shelters has only received a 38% increase in public funding over the last seven years despite a 60% increase in membership and a 100% growth in the provision of support services (Interview SE12). It is perhaps not surprising that any organisation would like increased funding but the allocation of public money is often dependent on a wide range of different variables. This includes factors such as membership levels, the number of services performed, project approval, and annual state and local government budgets. However, for many civil society organisations this creates:

> "a situation where you do not know how much you will get, if you will get anything at all or what you will do if you get nothing." (Interview SE12)

### Relations with government and the welfare state

Civil society organisations in Sweden typically enjoy a positive and constructive relationship with both local authorities and the government. According to a representative from one national pensioner's organisation:

> "generally speaking civil society works fine [in Sweden], it is relatively easy to influence people in power, it works well." (Interview SE1)

However, there are difficulties when it comes to government agencies and their administration. The Secretary General of a federation of local heritage associations expressed a commonly held view among civil society organisations that government agencies and departments are too compartmentalised. He called for greater co-operation between government agencies:

> "we apply for funding from three different government agencies, in three entirely different ways, I do everything in three different ways." (Interview SE3)

He added that while there is a lot of goodwill among politicians towards CSOs there is limited understanding of how the sector operates (Interview SE3). This is something he has tried to counter, with little success:

> "I have tried to explain to civil servants how involvement in popular mass movements works, what the driving forces are, what you can and cannot do but I have received nothing in return, it is one-sided [...] the public administration knows way too little about civil society." (Interview SE 3)

There are some signs that CSOs in Sweden are gaining in importance as providers of social welfare, especially for groups with limited or poorly defined access to public welfare systems (Vamstad and Karlsson 2018). This can be both a challenge and an opportunity for those organisations. The largest Swedish aid organisation has experienced several situations where they have compensated for short-comings in the public sector. These include the refugee crisis in 2015, the wildfires of 2018 and, less dramatically, the ongoing expansion of the country's defence forces (Interview SE11). It has now been tasked with co-ordinating volunteer responses to some public emergencies but this has raised questions about the role and nature of the organisation. As one senior official explained:

> "it is easy to get flattered for being noticed but our basic principle is independence, we must go our own way even if we get a lot of funding from the state." (Interview SE11)

Local aid organisations are seeing a new role for themselves in the Swedish welfare state. The Deputy Director of the local branch of one such association in Visby reported, "a lot of change in the last 5-7 years" which was a reference to the tightening of public health care benefits (Interview SE8). Her local organisation is now working with people with psychiatric diagnoses who have come to the end of what public health care services can do for them. This is traditionally a group with such serious issues that she did not imagine that her organisation had the capacity to help them:

> "previously I did not think we had the capacity to work with this particular group. However, we were in some respects blind to what we could do. We can provide things that [medical] psychiatric care cannot." (Interview SE8)

Her point about the growing need for voluntary services was echoed by the director of an aid organisation in Skellefteå who stated that:



> "our great challenge is that society's resources are inadequate, people are falling through the safety nets." (Interview SE9)

Both these organisations now have a much closer, more formal, relationship with the welfare institutions of the state and local authorities than in the past (Interviews SE 8,9,16).

### Political climate

Many of the organisations in the study reported that the political climate in which they operate has taken a turn for the worse. Their relationships with the government and mainstream politicians remain good but growing numbers of fringe groups, combined with a radicalisation and polarisation of the political debate, have created new and serious challenges. For example, the country's largest LGBT rights organisation has faced growing security threats. These have prompted, among other things, the introduction of new security measures at their offices and greater discretion on social media such as not disclosing the location of meetings (Interview SE2). The organisation's representative says that:

> "there are dangers in society that did not exist or did not exist in the same way before, particularly from neo-Nazi organisations, [although] it is not only neo-Nazis, there are also threats from others such as Islamic groups." (Interview SE2)

The rise of right-wing populism in Sweden has also landed the local heritage associations, traditionally a very uncontroversial movement, in hot water politically. The Secretary General of their federation explained that:

> "[local heritage and cultural heritage] are now politically sensitive issues since Swedish cultural heritage is perceived by the far right and some populists as something that should exclude people who come from elsewhere." (Interview SE3)

Even an organisation that works for the rights of people with disabilities has felt the political climate becoming tougher. Its respondent observed that:

> "there is a tougher debate, there is a harsher view on people's rights. People say things today that they would not had said ten years ago, things that would have been very controversial then but are not today." (Interview SE6)

One CSO which has experienced this polarisation of the political debate, especially on social media, is a large animal rights group. The respondent from this organisation said that it has become extremely difficult to have a constructive debate about the situation for animals in Sweden (Interview SE7). It is caught in the cross-fire between radical rights activists in the movement, who do not shy away from death threats and other illegal acts, and groups representing the agriculture sector on the other side who are calling them "terrorists" (Interview SE7). Their Secretary General stated that:

> "It is getting worse and worse [...] people do not even read what we write. If there is a case of animal cruelty then they will find out where those people live and, in the case of animal testing, they want to expose those researchers to the same tests." (Interview SE7)

She said that the situation is a little better at actual meetings such as conferences but that today:

> "everything happens on social media." (Interview SE7)

Another CSO which has experienced a change in the political climate is one of the large aid organisations in Stockholm. It supports some of the most vulnerable and marginal groups in society, including the homeless and those who beg in the streets. The Secretary General said that her organisation now sees the need to advocate for general human rights, something they did not have to do only a few years ago. "I never thought we would have politicians in parliament who question human rights" she said, referring to the Sweden Democrats (Interview SE16). She was critical of their rhetoric and how they demonised the Roma community, which she said had led to attacks on their shelters (Interview SE16). The criticism of the Roma community has also made donors more reluctant:

> "it was possible to run a campaign to help beggars four years ago but it is not possible today [...], today people do not seem to want to see or help beggars." (Interview SE16)

## Solutions: Modest innovations in a stable system

### Re-organisations and innovative organisational forms

Many traditional CSOs have implemented reforms in response to declining membership numbers. This is certainly the case for the main temperance organisation in Sweden, which is undergoing, "the largest organisational change in 50 years" according to the Secretary General (Interview SE6). These changes are aimed at making the organisation more efficient with fewer and larger districts and the professional use of staff and volunteers.

The Secretary General said that people in leadership roles had to be "superheroes" who were supposed to be good at everything but, "there are no superheroes, people are good at different things and then it is what you are good at, not what needs there are [that defines the work]". Instead, the organisation is hoping to form a national teams of experts which will offer advice when necessary.

A large organisation for the rights of people with disabilities is looking at similar changes since it was felt that:

> "the organisational form we have does not work for the districts, they have many older people and they cannot keep up with the work." (Interview SE5)

These traditional organisations are moving towards a more centralised and professional structure while their more recent counterparts are trying entirely new approaches which involve networks of activists, using social media as the main means of internal and external communication. This was the case with one organisation which coordinated health care personnel to help displaced people in Stockholm during the refugee crisis of 2015 (Interview SE14). This network has neither a traditional structure nor a specific programme or platform. Instead, it is organised through social media. The founder and chairperson thought this type of structure was important as she felt some people were reluctant to get involved with traditional organisations and this new approach made it much easier for individuals to participate (Interview SE14). A climate activist network in Uppsala is organised in a similar way. They have no membership fees and no requirement for those who attend their meetings to be members. Their spokesperson felt this innovative structure made the organisation more accessible but left it with fewer resources:

> "our greatest challenge is that we have no workforce and no income...people turn up at meeting to discuss climate change but there is little real commitment and no loyalty among participants." (Interview SE13)

This suggests that networks based on social media are good for connecting those who share the same interests where there is a clear and definable goal such as providing health care for refugees. However, it remains to be seen if this model can work in other scenarios where CSOs are involved.

### New initiatives and innovations

Some organisations have responded to declining membership numbers by implementing initiatives aimed at finding new sources of income. Many organisations that previously did not collect donations from the public have begun professional fundraising programmes and campaigns. The respondent from the animal rights organisation stated that it had experienced:

> "very positive financial growth" since it had started, "really serious fundraising", meaning it has now, "found a path forward that means we do not have to worry about money." (Interview SE7)

This increasing reliance on fundraising can be seen in the context of a wider professionalisation of civil society in Sweden as organisations move away from the original structures established by earlier mass movements.

Sweden's largest CSO for LGBT rights has come up with a number of new policies which boost income and also help to promote the cause. One such innovation is LGBT certification, where employers, both businesses and public agencies, pay for their staff to go through training in LGBT awareness. Their respondent explained that:

> "this training package involves a number of classes attended by all employees and we also make recommendations on how the business or organisation can improve diversity. It provides us with a great deal of income as well as being a way to change society, of course." (Interview SE2)

The same organisation has also started what it calls a Newcomers programme, which invites newly arrived LGBT migrants and refugees to create activities which are most commensurate with their lives. This has been a successful initiative which has helped to bring together many people who are often underrepresented in CSOs.

However, most interviewees accept that the level of innovation within the sector still seems to be quite low. Complacency may be one reason for this state of affairs. The Secretary General of an umbrella organisation for fundraising organisations says that another possible explanation is that there is a severe lack of investment in Swedish CSOs (Interview SE10). She wants to see them receive the same sort of financial support as entrepreneurs (Interview SE10).

In 1998, many of the largest civil society organisations – including several of those mentioned in this study – established a forum for innovation and development. A senior official from this organisation suggests that Swedish CSOs are often innovative and display considerable flexibility when taking on new challenges, especially when compared with government agencies (Interview SE15). He claims that the supposedly low level of innovation in the sector might be more a matter of perception than reality. Established organisations may not see themselves as innovators because they already work within existing structures for innovative responses to changes and challenges in society (Interview SE15).

## Conclusions

This chapter has offered an overview of CSOs in Sweden as well as an outline of some of the challenges they face and possible solutions. It has suggested that the traditional model of Swedish civil society is evolving, however slowly, and that this is having an impact on organisations which operate in this sector.

One such development seems to be changing patterns of civic engagement. The traditional popular mass movement organisations with large loyal memberships may be giving way to looser structures where involvement is temporary and focused on a specific task or outcome. As noted above, many traditional organisations are losing members while new networks are emerging which are heavily dependent on social media to coordinate activities and get their message out. Civil society in Sweden is changing in response to this development as organisations transform into leaner and more professional units which are more reliant on contributions of time, work and money from non-members (Qvist et al. 2018). This transformation may be difficult for some but it is not really a challenge to Swedish civil society itself. It is a move away from what has been a distinct and somewhat unusual pattern, when compared with other countries, towards something which more closely resembles the situation in other parts of Europe.

It could also be argued that some of the challenges described by the Swedish organisations might not be considered problematic elsewhere. For example, the fact that government grants often come in the form of funding for specific projects might present difficulties for some organisations but it is hard to see how that poses a fundamental challenge to their work.

Some of the identified challenges concern a lack of resources. This challenge is, of course, not something which is specific to Swedish CSOs and nothing in the study suggest that the problem is particularly acute in Sweden. Both old and new organisations are affected by this challenge. Traditional groups are losing members who might provide financial support and other resources while the new emerging networks find it hard to build a stable base which leads to long-term involvement and funding (Wallin 2018; Karlsson and Wallin 2017).

Another challenge was the changing relationship with government, not least in the welfare service area. Some organisations mentioned in this study see a new role for themselves in welfare service provision but they are aware that this role carries both challenges and opportunities. The chance of greater recognition for their services and a more formal relationship with government has to be balanced against the challenge of maintaining an independent voice for members and the causes they seek to represent. However, it should be mentioned that the examples in this chapter all concern services for individuals who are either on the fringes of, or entirely outside, the public welfare system.



This group seems to be growing which makes the aid provided by CSOs more important. However, their role as service providers within the publicly funded welfare sector is still very limited. About 3% of all publicly funded welfare services in Sweden are provided by non-profit actors, with almost 20% provided by for-profit businesses and the rest by the public sector (Sivesind 2017). The numbers are relatively steady for the non-profits, while the for-profits are growing their share. There is, in other words, no broad shift in responsibility for public welfare in Sweden from state to civil society and the issues outlined in this study regarding this sector only concern a small minority of Swedish CSOs

Thus, many of the challenges are far from existential and in some cases could barely be called challenges at all. Therefore, it perhaps not surprising that there are not radical solutions for these issues. The organisations participating in the study were asked about innovative responses to their challenges and most had trouble thinking of any, with many claiming that their groups were not strong on innovation. The overall impression given by the various representatives of these organisations was that they are content with things as they are. While a minority are undergoing considerable change, most are experimenting with limited reform including identifying new sources of income. However, overall there is little sense of urgency about the challenges they are currently facing.

That said, one issue remains troubling and has yet to be resolved. The political climate has worsened for Swedish CSOs in recent years. This is true for organisations working across issues ranging from LGBT rights and animal welfare to those groups representing people with disabilities or helping some of the poorest members of society. The public debate over many issues has become increasingly polarised with social media playing an important, albeit controversial role. Traditionally, Swedish civil society was characterised by popular mass movements which sought deliberation and consensus-seeking between the public, CSOs and government. Here, compromise and pragmatism were the key values. This tradition and the organisations still trying to adhere to it now face increasing challenges and with them an important aspect of Swedish democracy. It remains to be seen how serious and lasting this challenge is but for now there are no immediate solutions on the horizon.

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## List of interviews

Interview SE1: National CSO, pensioner interests, Head of Policy Issues
Interview SE2: National CSO, LGBT rights, Head of Policy Issues
Interview SE3: National federation, local heritage, Secretary General
Interview SE4: National federation, youth and leisure, Federation Chair
Interview SE5: National CSO, temperance, Chairperson
Interview SE6: National Federation, disability rights, Federation Chair
Interview SE7: National CSO, animal rights, Secretary General
Interview SE8: Local organisation, aid and social service, Deputy Director
Interview SE9: Local organisation, aid and social service, Director
Interview SE10: National umbrella organization, fundraising, Chairperson
Interview SE11: National CSO, aid and social service, Head of Organizational Development
Interview SE12: National CSO, women's rights and social service, Project Leader
Interview SE13: Local activist network, climate, Spokesperson
Interview SE14: Local organisation, health and migration, Founder and Chair
Interview SE15: National umbrella organisation, civil society innovation and development, Head of Operations
Interview SE16: Local organisation, aid and social service, Secretary General

## List of focus group participants, 11 June 2019

Federation Chair, national CSO
Secretary General, national CSO
Senior researcher, university
Senior researcher, university
Senior researcher and head of research centre
Researcher and active participant in local organisation
PhD researcher, university
Senior researcher, university

# UK


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# The UK: Civil society in times of political change

By Nicole Bolleyer

## Civil society overview

Overall, the UK voluntary sector is well documented. Since 1996, the UK Civil Society Almanac published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has provided detailed information on its evolution.[1] In 2017, the Almanac recorded a total of 166,854 active organisations across the UK, the majority of which are very small - 78,571 have an annual income of less than £10,000.[2] In 2018, the voluntary sector employed 865,916 people, representing almost 3% of the UK workforce. Since 2010, the voluntary sector workforce has grown by 11% with only 2011 and 2018 seeing small decreases, which underlines the sector's growing economic importance.[3] Most voluntary sector workers are employed in England (83%) reflecting the distribution of organisations (80%) across the UK and the respective population patterns (84%). Over a third (36%) of voluntary sector workers are employed in London and the South East. Considering workforce developments between 2010 and 2018 by region, only the North East of England and Yorkshire and Humberside have seen drops in voluntary sector workers, by 30% and 4% respectively. In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales the workforce increased, by 17%, 15% and 11% respectively.[4]

CSOs in the UK rely on various sources of income. Financial data from 2016/17 showed that the public constituted the largest single source of income, representing £22bn, or 45%, of the sector's total income (including donations, legacies, sales such as in charity shops and membership fees). This was followed by financial support from the government which represented 31% of the sector's total income (including grants and contracted services).[5] Unsurprisingly, it is the small organisations that rely most on private money, while bigger organisations benefit more from government support.[6] It is also not surprising that reliance on government support varies considerably by policy sector. Environmental and religious organisations receive little government support (9% and 11% respectively). By contrast, those CSOs working in the fields of employment and training as well as law and advocacy get nearly half of their income from government (49% and 43% respectively).[7] While many organisations increasingly rely on paid staff, volunteering is still wide-spread in the UK. In 2017/18 an estimated 11.9 million people volunteered at least once a month.[8] Reflecting the importance of private income for CSOs, fundraising is extensively regulated in the UK to ensure the integrity of the sector.[9] There is extensive ex post monitoring of charities through regular reporting requirements to the Charity Commission of England

1 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/> (accessed 01 July 2019). For sources with a regional focus see for Northern Ireland <https://www.nicva.org/stateofthesector>, for Scotland <https://scvo.org.uk/projects-campaigns/i-love-charity/sector-stats> and for Wales <https://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/the-third-sector-data-hub> (all accessed 31 August 2019).
2 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/profile/> (accessed 01 July 2019).
3 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/workforce/> (accessed 01 July 2019).
4 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/workforce/#by-location> (accessed 31 August 2019).
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6 See for details <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/funding/financial-trends-for-small-and-medium-sized-charities-ncvo-lloyds-bank-foundation-2016.pdf> (accessed 01 July 2019).
7 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/sector-finances/income-sources/> (accessed 01 July 2019).
8 See for details <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/impact/> (accessed 01 July 2019).
9 For an overview of fundraising regulation in common-law democracies, see Breen (2016).

and Wales, the main regulator of the charitable sector in the UK. [10][11] There are also two types of "public collection approvals" under the Charities Act 2006. This is complemented by standards for different types of fundraising activities which are stipulated in the Code of Fundraising Practice (containing guidance on legal obligations as well as soft law). Since 2016 this has been underpinned by an independent Fundraising Regulator established by the sector, which is in charge of investigating poor fundraising practices to restore trust in charities after a range of scandals.[12]

The growing importance of state funding, especially through service contracts, has been a key development in shaping how CSOs operate in general and how they relate to public authorities more particularly. The relationship between the state authorities and the voluntary sector had already begun to change significantly with the Labour government of Tony Blair in 1997. This created a new context for voluntary organisations characterised by a broadening of service provision, an increase in funding for this purpose, and, as a consequence of the two, a change in the method of state funding (Alcock 2009: 5; Davies 2011: 16). Reliance on "contracting" to outsource public service delivery to private actors (as a key part of the government's public sector reform programme) intensified after the devolution reforms of the late 1990s (Alcock 2009: 5; Harris 2010: 26–8, 35). Currently, over a fifth of all registered voluntary organisations are involved in social service delivery covering a wide range of policy areas including child welfare, youth services and welfare, family services, services for the disabled and for the elderly, self-help and other personal social services. Ten percent of these organisations provide services aimed at improving economic and social well-being (Jones et al 2016: 2065).

The increasing reliance on the voluntary sector for service provision prompted more government intervention in the sector. Legal reporting requirements imposed on service-providing organisations expanded and pressures to adopt certain managerial and employment practices intensified. These changes forced organisations to reduce their investments in political activities and campaigning (Deakin 2001: 38; Smith and Smyth 2010: 273–4; Davies 2011: 24–6, 31; Unison 2014: 15). Several expert commissions pointed to three major challenges for CSOs - resource availability, the appropriateness of legal and fiscal regimes, and resulting conflicts with organisational values (Deakin 2001: 41; Parry and Kelliher 2011: 82–4), all of which are still relevant today (see the section on 'Challenges' below).

The shift away from government grants awarded to organisations to realise their own projects to contracts given for the delivery of public services has been dramatic (Davies 2011: 16–17). In 2004/5, 43 per cent of government funding to the voluntary sector was made through grants and 57 per cent through contracts. However, by 2012/13 grants comprised just 17 per cent of organisational income from government while contracts comprised 83 per cent.[13] Since 2009/10, income from both grants and contracts has been falling, yet grants have fallen at a faster rate than contracts, indicating that statutory funders increasingly prefer contracts as a funding mechanism.[14] This imposes costs on organisations as in the case of contracts, performance standards are more specific, reporting requirements more burdensome and monitoring processes more extensive (Brown and Moore 2001; Harris 2010: 29–30; Dacombe 2011: 162; Bullain and Panov 2012: 32–3). Furthermore, organisations are held responsible for reaching specific performance targets and will not be reimbursed until the latter are met (Smith and Smyth 2010: 278). Since the financial crisis of 2008 organisations have been put under increasing pressure to provide services at lower costs (Davies 2011: 28; Parry and Kelliher 2011: 83–4; Unison 2014: 6–7), making the risk of not being reimbursed particularly problematic. This especially affects smaller organisations which have lost out more than their bigger counterparts. Between 2008/09 after the UK financial crisis and 2012/13 central and local government income decreased for all income bands except the largest of over £100m. Meanwhile, the income mix of charities below £1m annual income shifted from one in which government and individuals contributed to overall income about equally to one where the majority of income came from individuals.[15] As Clifford (2017) reports, in the charitable sector in England and Wales median real annual growth in organisations' income from 2008 was negative for six years in a row. Mid-sized charities, and those in more deprived local areas, have been affected most, echoing concerns about a "hollowing out" of the charitable sector and the uneven impact of austerity (see also the section on 'Challenges' below).

## Legal framework and political conditions

Charity law in the UK is highly complex, not the least as Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own charity commissions in charge of regulating public benefit organisations (i.e. charities) and which exist alongside the Charity Commission for England and Wales.[16] According to a recent study assessing the regulation of CSOs in 19 democracies, legal constraints applicable to CSOs in the UK are among the highest in Europe – together with Belgium, France and Ireland (Bolleyer 2018). The increasing differentiation and frequent changes of thresholds for the application of different legal requirements to varying types of charities has made the legal environment increasingly difficult to navigate. This is especially the case for small, amateur-run charities which do not have access to professional legal advice. Moreover, constraints related to charity registration and reporting have become stricter in recent reforms, while the monitoring capacity of the Charity Commission of England and Wales has been systematically strengthened.[17] Most recently, in 2016, the

10 The legal concept of 'charity' under Common law corresponds to public benefit organisations under Civil law.

11 Northern Ireland and Scotland have their own regulator (see also below).

12 See <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/about/history/> (accessed 21 January 2018), and <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/standards-improving-says-chief-executive-fundraisingregulator/fundraising/article/1448294> (accessed 22 August 2019).

13 House of Commons Briefing Paper, 'Charities and the Voluntary Sector: Statistics', Number SN05428, 21 July 2015, pp. 9–10, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05428> (accessed 21 July 2019).

14 UK Civil Society Almanac 2016, <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac16/income-fromgovernment/> (accessed 21 July 2019).

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16 For a UK–Ireland comparison (including the charity commissions of Scotland and Northern Ireland), see Breen et al. (2009).

17 The following discussion focuses on changes in England and Wales whose legal regimes has undergone most significant changes in recent years. In Northern Ireland, the Charities Act (NI) 2008 (which established the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and aimed for the creation of an up-to-date register of charities) was last amended in 2013 by the Charities Act (NI) 2013 allowing for registrations to commence in December the same year. <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/about-us/charity-legislation/> (accessed 31 August 2019). See for details on a government consultation taking place in 2019 about the reform of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2019/07/analysis-consultation-scottish-charity-law/documents/analysis-consultation-scottish-charity-law/analysis-consultation-scottish-charity-law/govscot%3Adocument/analysis-consultation-scottish-charity-law.pdf> (accessed 31 August 2019).

Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act extended the Commission's ability to inspect charities and sanction trustees, while being criticised for providing insufficient safeguards for the CSOs regulated by it.[18]

Assessments of CSO law in the UK tend to focus on charities (e.g. Synge 2017). However, this overlooks that simultaneous applicability of charity law and inclusive, more broadly applicable legislation (for example, company law or third-party regulation as detailed below), presents a particular challenge to charities, as "practitioners are required to be both specialists and generalists at the same time" (Piper and van der Pas 2012: 64). CSOs can choose between different a range of different legal forms. These include the unincorporated association, the charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), the 'charitable company', the company by limited guarantee, and the 'charitable trust'.[19] Through the latter four forms, organisations can acquire legal status, the ability to conduct business in their own name, and limited liability (that is, neither members nor trustees will have to contribute in the event of a financial loss). Until very recently, charities tended to incorporate as 'charitable companies'. However, since 2013 they have been able to register as a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). This new status grants legal incorporation together with charitable status (hence, tax benefits) through the same registration process with the Charity Commission, rather than organisations having to register with both the Charity Commission and Companies House in order to legally incorporate. At the same time, organisations not qualifying as charities, such as interest groups or political parties, usually incorporate as companies by limited guarantee or stay unincorporated. In sum, if organisations seek legal recognition and the privileges linked to it, the following two legal forms are (by now) the most relevant: first, the form of the CIO acquired through registration with, and monitored by, the Charity Commission; second, the legal form of company by limited guarantee acquired through registration with, and monitored by, Companies House which is also open to organisations formed for predominantly political or partisan purposes (which are therefore ineligible for charity status).

Restrictions on public benefit or charitable organisations' political activities — especially if they receive special tax benefits that are denied to other organisations — are not only usual in common-law jurisdictions such as the UK but also known under civil law (Bolleyer 2018). While charities cannot be legally formed for political purposes (Dunn 2008), case law recognises campaigning and political activity as legitimate activity for charities, provided that they are undertaken to further a charity's charitable purposes and that such activity is reasonable in terms of impact and cost (Morris 2016: 110). While statutory law has remained silent on this matter, since the 1990s the Charity Commission has issued guidance to clarify legal requirements regarding charities' engagement in political activities (Deakin 2001: 45). Specifically, while charities must not support or oppose a particular political party or candidate, they may engage in campaigning and political activity to secure or oppose a legal change or government policy (Morris 2016: 110). Meanwhile, other guidance by the Charity Commission has made clear that charities are not allowed to donate to political parties. They must also be independent from parties, regardless of whether or not there is an upcoming election. Finally, they are warned to be careful in their cooperation with MPs or political parties, which is a more ambiguous restriction.[20] More recently, there has also been guidance from the Electoral Commission about charities' involvement in election campaigns. Hence, while there has not been an expansion or specification of constraints through legislative reform, the presence (and increasing strengthening) of independent regulators has had an impact on the legal environment in which charities and other CSOs operate.

While charity law has been established as a separate body of law, especially since the 1990s (Piper and van der Pas 2012: 64), there is also regulation in the UK which targets the specific activities of CSOs generally. One example of this is the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act of 2014. Despite commonly being referred to as the "Lobbying Act", the impact of the newly introduced lobby register on the political activities of non-profits and public benefit organisations has been comparatively limited. The legislation only targets paid or commercial third-party lobbyists predominantly used by resource-strong, larger organisations. It does not regulate those organisations which use in-house lobbyists. Hence, as most British lobbyists are employed by the organisation for whom they lobby (McKay and Wozniak 2017:1), the register does not directly affect most politically active organisations. This narrow remit (attributed by some to hasty drafting, by others as deliberate muddling in the face of strong opposition to the law from corporate lobbyists) has been heavily criticised (Keeling et al. 2017: 128).

Such verdicts contrast strikingly with criticisms of the regulation of "third parties" that also formed part of the Lobbying Act. Its remit was considered as far too broad and turned out to be more constraining than case law regulating charities' political activities just discussed, leaving aside that it applies much more widely than to civil society organisations with the legal status of charity. Third-party regulation specifies the type of legitimate activities undertaken by "non-party actors" - essentially covering all individuals and organisations that campaign in the run up to elections but do not stand as political parties or candidates. The section in the Lobbying Act on "non-party campaigning" amended the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA), cutting the amount of money which third parties are allowed to donate in the year ahead of an election. In particular, national spending limits, which were introduced with PPERA, were reduced by around 60 per cent. Moreover, the legislation introduced constituency spending limits and expanded the scope of campaigning activities subject to regulation.[21] Finally, while the new law raised the amount of money that organisations engaged in campaigning could spend before having to register with the Electoral Commission, thereby reducing the range of organisations subject to regulation, it introduced additional administrative and reporting requirements imposed on those organisations regulated by it (Abbott and Williams 2014: 512–13).

18 See, for details, House of Commons Briefing Paper, 'Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill [HL]: in detail', Number 07208, 22 October 2015, pp. 5, 31–2, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7208#fullreport> (accessed 02 July 2019). Nicole Bolleyer and Anika Gauja, 'What does the New Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act Mean for the Voluntary Sector?', *Democratic Audit UK*, 13 April 2016, <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2016/04/13/what-does-the-new-charities-protection-and-social-investment-act-mean-for-the-voluntary-sector/> accessed 8 December 2017); David Brindle, 'The Charities Act: What you Need to Know', *Guardian*, 03 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/feb/03/the-charities-act-what-you-need-to-know> (accessed 3 July 2019).

19 Rather than being a form chose by associations of citizens, this type of charity is usually set up to manage money or property for a charitable purpose, usually run by a small group of trustees, who are appointed rather than elected, without having a membership.

20 Rosamund McCarthy, 'Charities Q&A: Elections', Guardian, 22 February 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/feb/22/charities-elections-campaigning-political-activities>; Electoral Commission, 'Charities and Campaigning', <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/intro-campaigning-charities-npc.pdf> (both accessed 31 August 2019).

21 Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement, 'The Lobbying Act: Analysis of the Law, and Regulatory Guidance Recommendations' (February 2014), pp. 7–10, <https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/part-2-of-the-lobbying-act-analysis-and-guidance-recommendations.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2019).

The draft legislation was heavily criticised prior to its adoption. Concerns were raised that it might stifle the voices of civil society organisations—as charities were subsumed under the law's inclusive definition of "third party" (Third Party Campaigning Review 2016: 21–2). Despite revisions, these criticisms intensified after the final law came into force. Subsequently, the Liberal Democrats (in government when the law was passed) and the Scottish National Party have asked for reform of the legislation, while Labour and the Green Party want it repealed.[22] Theresa May's 2017 snap election underlined some of the practical problems with the law as the communications of all organisations in the year prior to the election fell under its remit retrospectively. Organisations consequently changed their key messages during the election period and spent time and effort logging their activities closely, with some being unclear, for example, about whether fundraising events organised prior to the calling of the election were governed by the new law.[23] Meanwhile, sanctions imposed on organisations for rule violations were significant. In 2017, Greenpeace became the first organisation charged under the new legislation and was fined £30,000 for refusing to register as a "third-party campaigning organisation" in the run-up to the 2015 election, an act of protest against the restrictions imposed by the new legislation. A government-commissioned review led by a Conservative peer made several recommendations about revising the law and addressing criticism of the legislation. However, in the summer of 2017, the government declined to make any changes.

At the same time, existing tensions between organisations' service-providing and political activities have grown as well. Attempts by the Conservative government to introduce an "anti-advocacy clause" in grant agreements—in the wake of high-profile scandals—failed in 2016. However, the government still introduced new, more elaborate standards for grant allocation and more extensive monitoring of so-called "high-risk" grants.[24] Meanwhile, paid-for political lobbying does not form part of the list of eligible expenditures, unless explicitly required by a grant.[25]

In sum, recent legislative changes in the UK have overall enhanced legal restrictions not only on those CSOs with charitable status benefitting from state support, but also those "non-party actors" attempting to have political influence at election time. Finally, in 2018, a piece of legislation came into force which affected public institutions, businesses and CSOs alike. The Data Protection Act 2018 (supplementing the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and incorporating it into UK law) controls how personal information can be legally held and used by institutions and organisations. The legislation does not contain any exceptions for charities or other CSOs and has a range of practical implications for how those organisations handle personal data, incentivising changes in procedures and practices to assure compliance with the regulations (see also the 'Challenges' section).[26]

22 'Lobbying Bill: Think Again', *Guardian*, 20 October 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/>

23 When the bill was drafted, the government assured the sector that there would be a five-year election cycle. Fiona Harvey and Anushka Asthana, 'Chilling" Lobbying Act Stifles Democracy, Charities Tell Party Chiefs', *Guardian*, 6 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/06/chilling-lobbying-act-stifles-democracy-write-charities-party-chiefs> (accessed 29 June 2019).

24 See Gov.uk (2016). 'Government Functional Standard for General Grants Guidance'. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722200/Grants-Standard-SIX-Grant-Agreements.pdf> (accessed 31 August 2019).

25 Kristy Weakly, 'Government Replaces Anti-Advocacy Clause with New Grant Standards', *Civil Society Media*, 2 December 2016, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722200/Grants-Standard-SIX-Grant-Agreements.pdf> (accessed 31 August 2019).

26 See for details Gov.uk (2018). 'Data Protection'. <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection> (accessed 09 September 2019).

Meanwhile, Brexit has brought considerable uncertainty for most CSOs.Though a formal departure had not yet happened at the time this report was written, the implications of the 2016 referendum have been felt across much of the sector. Concerns centre around issues related to economic uncertainty and more specifically how any recession which might follow a "hard Brexit" might negatively affect voluntary sector finances in terms of fundraising and government support. Further worries concern access to the EU workforce (both paid and unpaid) on which many CSOs depend as well as the risk of losing EU funding. Meanwhile, increased social tensions might particularly affect organisations working with minorities (e.g. immigrants) and questions about how the flow of personal data between the UK and abroad would be regulated in a "no deal scenario" remain unresolved.[27]

Furthermore, Brexit has contributed to societal politicisation and polarisation leading to the formation of new initiatives not only in the form of pro- and anti-Brexit political parties (notably Change UK and the Brexit Party). Also, a diverse range of activists on both sides of the divide have mobilised in social movements (Ishkanian 2019). Meanwhile, alongside the mobilisation around the two opposing camps, there have also been attempts to give CSOs a voice in the Brexit process. For instance, the Brexit Civil Society Alliance, formed in 2017, brings together charities, voluntary and campaigning organisations across the UK in an effort to shape and improve Brexit legislation. Similarly, the Civil Society Brexit Project in Scotland seeks to influence Brexit and help CSOs to prepare for the potential consequences of Brexit. Whether these initiatives have any political impact in a climate of growing confrontation and division remains unclear. Furthermore, recent studies have suggested that Brexit will reinforce inter-regional inequalities and is likely to have a negative impact on civil society, particularly in economically deprived areas (Billing et al 2019). This is despite various government promises to soften the blow of any "no deal Brexit".[28]

## Challenges for CSOs: Between financial pressure, Brexit and legal change

The challenges that CSOs face in modern societies are multifaceted. A recent survey of more than 800 regional and national advocacy - and service-oriented CSOs across the UK found that the biggest challenges appeared to be recruiting and retaining members, concerns around changes in public opinion about organisations' core issues and media access, and issues concerning an ageing demographic.[29] Challenges related to state funding were generally not considered important, as for most smaller organisations (that dominate the sector and thus the survey), state funding was not a main source of income. Indeed, only

27 See for details Wilding K. (2018). 'Brexit and the Voluntary Sector: Preparing for Change', *NCVO*, 19 October, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/2395-brexit-and-the-voluntary-sector-preparing-for-change>, Steadman J. (2018) 'The Potential Impact of Brexit on the Third Sector', Red Brick, 28 November, <https://www.redbrickresearch.com/2018/11/28/impact-of-brexit-third-sector/>, The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2016). 'Brexit: Implications for the Vol-untary Sector', <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/about_us/media-centre/implications-of-brexit-for-voluntary-sector-28-june-2016.pdf?_cldee=Y2Fyb2wuYm90dGVuQHZvbm5lLm9yZy51aw%3d%3d&utm_source=ClickDimensions&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EU%20ref%20result%202016&urlid=5> (accessed 01 July 2019).

28 See for details The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2018). 'Brexit and the Voluntary Sector: Preparing for Change', <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/europe/NCVO-Brexit-factsheet.pdf> (accessed 11 July 2019).

29 See for details on the surveys and data access the 'Regulating Civil Society Project'<https://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/regulatingcivilsociety/surveys/> (accessed 29 June 2019).

12.8% of CSOs surveyed identified national, subnational or supranational government funding as important or very important. In contrast, private income, such as membership fees, was widely considered important reflecting a widespread worry about sustaining membership. Concerns regarding changes in public opinion and media access were closely related to this, pointing to the efforts of CSOs to sustain their wider societal support and donor base by effectively communicating the importance of those issues central to their mission.

To explore the challenges faced by CSOs in the last 12 months, thirteen interviews with representatives of various organisations were conducted in the summer of 2019. These covered local, regional and national organisations operating in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as well as across the UK. With (different from the survey above) small, medium and large organisations relatively equally represented, the challenges most often mentioned by respondents were concerned with maintaining (mostly government) funding, the uncertainties related to Brexit and changes in organisations' legal environment which will be discussed below. Funding pressures and concerns around Brexit were often presented as interrelated, with Brexit-related economic difficulties expected to further reinforce tight government spending. Member recruitment (the top concern in the above mentioned survey) was not a major issue apart from smaller organisations whose finances were completely dependent on membership fees and for whom recruitment was the number one challenge.

### The decline in, and tighter regulation of, government funding

Most CSOs identified declining government support for the voluntary sector as a major problem, with a direct impact on their own operations. The situation had already deteriorated following the financial crisis in 2008. Austerity was repeatedly mentioned by respondents. That trend of reduced government support continued in 2019 and seems to have had an impact on organisations irrespective of scope as it was mentioned by local, regional and national organisations alike. A few organisations indicated that austerity had made fundraising difficult as citizens who are increasingly pressed for resources are less likely to engage in fundraising initiatives and contribute as donors. However, reduced government funding granted to organisations directly was clearly the dominant theme. It was associated, on the organisational level, with difficulties in retaining staff and the planning of policy-related activities but also with staff cuts and reductions of programmes and activities (Interviews UK11, UK13). At the same time, a shift from grants to contracts, which according to one interviewee were "being won primarily on price rather than quality", has made the competition for that government funding which is still available, more challenging (Interview UK9). Bidding for contracts to provide specific services is now more demanding and required organisations to adapt their managerial and financial operations. This means more organisations are essentially competing for less funding which is, in turn, putting organisations under pressure to deliver more for less. This is generating, according to one respondent, a "race to the bottom" (Interview UK9). As another representative explained:

> "there can sometimes be cases when we bid for a service but we have to be cautious, and to make sure what has been offered, so the amount of money being offered by the local authorities is enough to cover what the service will cost to run. And in recent years we had to start thinking about possibly charging for some services which were previously free." (Interview UK8)

As governments adopt a project funding model (leading to a cut in the core funding which helps organisations to cover basic running costs) – a recent move by the Welsh government - policy and advocacy oriented groups that do not deliver services find it more difficult to gain financial support (Interview UK4). Similar pressures have been felt in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Interviews UK9, UK3). In general terms, changes in government funding are considered detrimental to the ability of CSOs to experiment and be 'pioneering' (Interview UK6). Several organisations indicated that short funding cycles which require applications for government support on an annual basis make longer-term planning difficult. As one respondent explained:

> "a lot of organisations which are dependent on grants funding, maybe they have only funding for one year and so the next year is the same cycle again, and it is difficult for them to do any long term planning or to make any kind of strategic investment, because they do not really know what their situation is going to be in the next year." (Interview UK5)

Turning to regional funding, a representative of a Scottish organisation (Interview UK7) linked this problem to the fact that the Scottish government itself is funded annually, preventing commitments to more long-term programmes. In Northern Ireland regional organisations have been affected by the political stalemate, as the region has been without a government since early 2017. While a new government programme is expected to bring more opportunity for organisations to partner with government and engage in service delivery in a range of areas such as health, criminal justice, and education, it has to date not been passed (Interview UK3).

Tighter, and more strictly regulated, government funding not only affects the availability and nature of financing but also impacts on organisations' willingness and ability to organise in wider networks, though paradoxically cross-organisational collaboration is mentioned most often as possible solutions to the challenges CSOs in the UK voluntary sector face (see below). Umbrella organisations with corporate or associational members have found it more demanding to recruit members who have less funding available that is more strictly earmarked (Interviews UK1, UK4). As one organisational representative noted:

> "a lot of organisations used to be able to get a certain amount of core funding which they were able to spend on things like membership of a network like ours. And that gave them that core stability, but now they increasingly moved to project funding each time, meaning that they're not allowed to spend that project funding on being part of a network like ours, because it's restricted to that particular project." (Interview UK4)

Those organisations which can still afford to belong to networks and umbrella organisations now want to see the benefits of this membership. This has enhanced pressure on umbrella organisations to deliver "value for money" not just when dealing with government but also for their own members (Interview UK1).

## Brexit

Brexit was cited as another major challenge by most of the respondents interviewed for this study. This was often in conjunction with a more challenging funding environment (an exception being very locally oriented organisations which considered themselves little affected (Interviews UK2, UK10, UK12)). Most interviewees expected an economic downturn in the case of a "hard" Brexit. There was also concern about a loss of European funding such as the structural funds which benefit poorer areas in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and the associated negative impact on CSOs working with communities there. Given a decline in government spending over the last ten years, organisations "fear that [EU funding] either won't be replaced or won't be replaced at the same level" (Interview UK7). Other concerns included growing difficulties in workforce recruitment, related to constraints on free movement of people. At the same time, demand for charity support (e.g. in the health sector) is expected to increase in the face of negative knock-on effects regarding the supply and regulation of medicines and handling of new regulations coming into place in a post-Brexit scenario (Interviews UK6, UK1). More specifically, organisations in the environmental sector were concerned about legal changes as most environmental regulation comes from Europe. They have shifted their focus from how to improve legislation to how to maintain existing protections and prevent them from being watered down after Brexit (Interview UK4). As the representative of one regional, service-oriented charity put it, Brexit operates "in the background as a kind of negative driver in terms of planning for the provision of services" affecting workforce planning issues and contributing to wider societal, economic and political uncertainty (Interview UK9).

Unsurprisingly, the concerns articulated by a representative of a regional organisation in Northern Ireland were particularly pronounced and focused on the threat posed by a "hard border" dividing the island of Ireland in case of a "hard" Brexit. Economic implications were expected to be particularly pronounced and to strongly affect organisations operating in poorer areas. A potential return to violence, which would fundamentally affect civil society in Northern Ireland, was a particular worry. In practical terms, many CSOs are now used to operating freely across the Ireland-UK border in their daily activities. One respondent explained that, while many CSOs in Northern Ireland are locally orientated,

> "a significant group of them is UK-wide and there is also a significant group that operates on an all-Ireland basis, so an all-island basis. They do that now with little real impediment and for example some of the children's organisations, they literally move children back and forward for activities across the border without really thinking about it. They don't see it as taking children to another state. And a lot of them are now worried about what the legal implications [of Brexit] will be (...)." (Interview UK3)

For Scottish CSOs, Brexit was associated with another fundamental question, that of independence. As significant resources and influence in civil society in Scotland come from big UK-wide organisations, "there will be big questions about what that [Independence] will mean, both opportunities and risks in terms of funding streams, in terms of (...) governance structures." (Interview UK9)

## Changes to CSOs' legal environment

For most organisations the legal environment has become more challenging. A range of organisations mentioned scandals in the voluntary sector that have created highly negative media coverage and increased the pressures on charities to demonstrate that they are run ethically and financially transparent.[30] As the representative of one umbrella organisation put it:

> "the regulator particularly in England and Wales, the Charity Commission, has changed its tone and approach towards charities, very much looking at the transparency, trust agenda, putting quite a lot of pressure on charities to not to just meet their reporting requirements but also meet the expectations of the public." (Interview UK1)

More specifically, organisations stressed the enhanced reporting burdens but also the growing complexity and ambiguity of regulation (Interviews UK9, UK12, UK13). While legal requirements cover areas such as accounting, audit, taxation and employment law, there is the need to simultaneously report to several regulators (e.g. the Charity Commission and Companies House) or in the case of service-oriented organisations to different inspection regimes (Interview UK9). The legal environment is particularly challenging for smaller charities which operate without the support staff required to develop policies in areas such as data protection and safeguarding (Interview UK12). Recent changes in the charitable sector were most pronounced in Northern Ireland. A register of charities was only established in 2013. Before the Charities Act (NI) of 2008, which created a Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, charities were unregulated and applied for tax exemption through the tax authorities. That the regulation to date does not formulate a minimum financial threshold for registration, was identified as major problem for small charities in the region which found it difficult to meet legal requirements as, "they do not necessarily understand what is being asked of them" (Interview UK3). Generally, when specific legal changes were problematised, this tended to be shaped by the profile of the organisation. Advocacy orientated organisations mentioned third party regulation put into place in 2014 through the 'Lobbying Act' as having a 'chilling effect' on the sector (Interview UK1). As another interviewee put it:

> "[It] seems to me really excessively restrictive for a small charity not to be able to publish its recommendations for the environment for fear of falling foul of the lobbying act rules." (Interview UK4)

Another salient area - equally relevant to advocacy and service organisations - was the Data Protection Act 2018. According to one respondent, "there has been a lot of movement for a lot of organisations in getting their head around not just their own compliance with GDPR [General Data Protection Act]" but also how donor information can be held, thereby impacting on organisations' fundraising activities (Interview UK1). Related to this, one representative stressed that cyber security has become a crucial issue:

> "voluntary organisations do carry very sensitive information at times on people, and if it gets breached it could literally destroy an organisation in terms of its public credibility." (Interview UK6)

30 The Institute of Business Ethics (2018). 'Ethics in the Charity Sector', <https://www.ibe.org.uk/userassets/briefings/ibe_briefing_63_ethics_in_the_charity_sector.pdf> (accessed 01 September 2019).

Given the new data protection legislation, one respondent reported that, "over the last couple of years, the biggest change has been the tightening up of regulations concerning the management of data and personal data" (Interview UK11). Another one added that: "the [Charity] Commissioners' Office is starting to be more active about the way charities are using data not just on GDPR but more around transparency and behaviours" (Interviews UK1, UK11). Meanwhile, recently introduced regulations on fit and proper persons testing and the debarring of [charity] trustees has begun to be felt on the ground (Interview UK1).

## Solutions: Cooperating, diversifying funding and new technologies

The respondents considered collaboration within the sector as an important way of coping with the core challenges related to funding access, legal and political uncertainty. This accords with attempts to develop new funding strategies and use new technologies to mobilise support.

### Strengthening capacity through cross-organisational collaboration

The strategy most often mentioned by respondents to address the various challenges facing CSOs was cross-organisational collaboration and cooperation. This involved engaging in multi-partner projects and broadening organisational activities (Interviews UK7, UK4, UK5, UK10, UK13). Facing an "increased urgency to think more strategically about collaborative opportunities" (Interview UK9), some organisations mentioned the option of organisational merger (Interviews UK3, UK9). Another idea suggested by some respondents was formal collaboration based on structured memoranda of understanding. This would provide a foundation for joint activities, while retaining organisations' individual identities and governing structures (Interview UK9). According to one respondent:

> "it's almost like a reality dawning that the resource constraints are not going to ease anytime soon and Brexit uncertainty thrown on top of that, giving a sense that if organisations are going to survive, then we have to be much more creative in terms of structures and the governance around that comes with how we work with others." (Interview UK9)

One example of such collaboration where organisations have come together to push for a shared political goal, is that of Northern Irish voluntary organisations mobilising to influence the Brexit process to prevent a "no deal" Brexit (Interview UK3). Alternative models envisage more instrumental pooling of resources to cope with an increasingly complex legal environment. As one interviewee noted, "I think we will see more charities sharing HR and accountancy and financial departments in order to make efficiencies" (Interview UK8). Closely linked to more cooperation between organisations is the push to make organisations more inclusive. This is especially the case as regional organisations broaden membership criteria to reach out to, and facilitate work with, organisations operating outside or beyond their own area of expertise (Interview UK4). Finally, external partners (e.g. universities, capacity building organisations) are involved in an ongoing review of current performance in an effort to improve future outcomes (Interview UK13).

### Reinforcing and diversifying funding strategies

Despite wide-spread concerns about the decline and changing nature of government funding, several organisations pointed to the need to more proactively build partnerships with government to work across the public and voluntary sector and for organisations to get more involved in (Interviews UK3, UK7, UK1) and to broaden organisational capacity for service delivery (Interview UK5). Meanwhile, some organisations pointed to the need to develop new innovative strategies to raise revenue and develop assets. This included revenues from sales and placing a greater focus on social enterprise (Interviews UK5, UK7). As one representative put it, in a context where grant support is declining, "we (...) need to diversify and develop our brand and our ability to compete (...) with other charities in terms of supporters and donors and legacies in people's wills" as well as engage in "commercial and enterprise-based activities" (Interview UK9).

### New media and digital technology

One area where a range of organisations saw considerable potential was the use of digital technology to connect to members and mobilise a broader support base or, to some extent, counter increasing difficulties in reaching relevant audiences (Interviews UK3, UK12). Respondents noted other benefits including the ability to connect to people charities might otherwise not reach and also to sustain ongoing consultations with stakeholders, employees, volunteers, beneficiaries and donors (Interviews UK6, UK8). Digital technologies were also helpful in liaising with some members who were reluctant to travel to meetings in person (e.g. through podcasts, use of Facebook or developing an app for the annual conference) (Interview UK1). Social media also offered a range of other possibilities including new fundraising techniques, improved campaigning strategies, better service provision, and fresh ways of delivering the organisation's core message and mission (Interviews UK1, UK6, UK12). To give two examples of the latter, one of the organisations involved in this study created a social media space for patients and their carers to engage with each other, supported by volunteer moderators (Interview UK6). Another CSO operating in the cultural sector created and now offers, free of charge:

> "a platform through which [members] could run their own crowdfunding projects. In other words, we would provide the facilities in terms of the technical infrastructure, some advice in relation to how to pitch their project to a wider public, and we would collect the money on their behalf and then give it to them." (Interview UK11)

## Conclusions

The UK has a vibrant voluntary sector. Some CSOs have a close relationship with the government and are heavily reliant on the state for funding while others do not follow this model. Though a shift towards contracting instead of grants had already begun in the 1990s, access to funding has become more challenging since the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures. A number of laws have been introduced in recent years (both nationally and regionally) with repercussions for the operation of not only charities but CSOs generally. The sector has also been affected by Brexit. There is particular concern in Northern Ireland where there are growing fears about the implications of a hard border between the UK and Ireland. More generally, Brexit has led to both political polarisation

and widespread uncertainty. This has inevitably had a considerable impact on CSOs in the UK. Innovative solutions are hard to come by, as CSOs are struggling to cope with the long term impact of austerity combined with Brexit uncertainty. However, some see room for improvement through enhanced inter-organisational collaboration (in terms of joint activities or sharing of resources), the diversification of funding streams (e.g. through crowd funding) and the creative use of modern technologies to reach out to followers and deliver services more efficiently.

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# Estonia

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# Estonia: Search for a fresh vision, adjusted identity and upgraded operations

By Maris Jõgeva

## Civil society overview

Estonian civil society is regularly ranked among the best performing of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including the former states of the Soviet Union.[1] However, local critics complain that it lacks energy, is complacent and prone to stagnation. The reality lies somewhere in the middle. As elsewhere, there have been problems but there have also been success stories in areas such as civic engagement, innovation and the growth of the CSO sector.

The roots of Estonian civil society lie in a period of national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, which saw the development of a wide range of cultural and educational societies and cooperatives. During the Soviet occupation civil society activity was severely restricted. However, recent years have seen a resurgence in the number of CSOs as older ones were revived and new ones established, mostly with foreign support and guidance.

Cooperation between the government and CSOs was formalised in 2002 when the Estonian parliament adopted the Civil Society Development Concept (EKAK). This was an agreement on the values and principles, which should guide both public and third sector actors in the development of civil society.[2] Since then, both sides have tried to work together to create best practices for cooperation and to establish formal mechanisms, albeit with mixed results. Nonetheless, it has given CSOs a voice when calling for greater accountability, more transparency in policy development and increased infrastructure for capacity building in the sector.

There are around 23,000 non-profit associations and foundations in Estonia.[3] CSOs are particularly active in culture and art, sports and recreational activities, and community development (Table 1).[4] CSOs are also active in environmental activism, social care and education. Professional CSOs develop and provide services and/or advocate for social change. 93% of social enterprises are registered as non-profit associations.

1 USAID, *2017 Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, (USAID, 2018), pp. 81-88, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/2017_CSO_Sustainability_Index_for_Central_and_Eastern_Europe_and_Eurasia.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).

2 Parliament of Estonia, Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, (Tallinn: 2002) <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumendid/Kodanikuyhiskond/estonian_civil_society_development_concept.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).

3 The e-Business Register, Centre of Registers and Information Systems, <https://www2.rik.ee/rikstatfailid/failid/tabel.php?url=19_06tg.html> (accessed 01 June 2019).

4 TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS, *Kodanikuühiskonna arengukava mõjude vahehindamine*, (Tallinn: 2019) <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumendid/Uuringud/Kodanikuyhiskond/2019_kodanikuuhiskonna_arengukava_mojude_vahehindamine.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0hPhHetoHjQkaqc5Ca3oqc6XRm_l77s0IiKtTS3INAgPn3xlGbYwGoqIQ> (accessed 25 November 2019).

Table 1. Main activities of CSOs in Estonia, 2017

| Main fields of CSO activity | |
|---|---|
| Recreational and hobby activities | 39% |
| Culture/art | 31% |
| Sports | 23% |
| Education/science | 19% |
| Community development | 17% |
| Representation of interests of social groups | 15% |
| Development of society | 13% |
| Environment | 9% |
| Social services | 9% |

Source: TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS (2019)

Some recent surveys have suggested that Estonians are becoming more active in society with 27% of respondents giving money and 16% donating time in the past twelve months.[5] Other local studies suggest that half of all Estonian citizens either volunteer now or have done so during the past year.[6]

According to the USAID Sustainability Index, Estonian civil society has a strong infrastructure, simple and supportive legal environment, and a good public image. However, successive reports have not been as positive in terms of the organisational and financial capacity of CSOs in Estonia.[7]

The main sources of funding of CSOs have been stable for years, and a third (33%) of organisations have three or more funding sources. The main sources of funds for CSOs are membership fees (30%), economic activity (20%), support from local governments (19%), funding from state budgets (10%) and grants from national funds and foundations (8%) (Table 2). Surveys show that the proportion of CSOs earning their own income has increased to 57% in 2017 from 49% in 2013. This either indicates growing independence from public sources of income or a change in the balance of state funding of grants and services. Only 16% of CSOs reported having no income.[8]

5 Charities Aid Foundation, *World Giving Index 2018*, (CAF 2018), <https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf_wgi2018_report_webnopw_2379a_261018.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).
6 M.Käger et al., *Vabatahtlikus tegevuses osalemise uuring 2018*, (Tallinn: Balti Uuringute Instituut, 2019), <https://www.ibs.ee/wp-content/uploads/Aruanne.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).
7 USAID, *2017 Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, pp. 81 – 88.
8 TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS.



Table 2. Sources of funding 2009-2017

| Source of funding | 2017 | 2013 | 2009 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Membership fees | 30% | 30% | 23% |
| Economic activity | 20% | 16% | 12% |
| Local government | 19% | 18% | 24% |
| Government institutions | 10% | 11% | 10% |
| State funded foundations | 8% | 9% | 10% |
| Donations from Estonian private persons | 5% | 5% | 4% |
| EU programmes | 4% | 5% | 10% |
| Estonian private companies | 4% | 2% | 2% |
| Foreign organisations | 1% | 1% | 0% |
| Charity | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Local funds | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Foreign donations | 0% | 1% | 0% |

Source: TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS (2019)

Public funding is available to CSOs working in almost every field. This comes from local or national budgets and is available for both organisations and individual projects, although many argue that it is not equally accessible to all. In 2013 the government and CSOs agreed on a set of principles on the funding of civil society from the state budget. This was done to safeguard public trust so that state funds allocated to CSOs were used in the best interests of society and so that financial support contributed to the growth of civic engagement.[9] However, these principles have not always been followed and CSOs have called for increased transparency regarding decision-making, greater accessibility, and better understanding of the impact of grant-giving.[10]

The National Foundation for Civil Society (NFCS) was established in 2007 in response to foreign donors cutting their grants. It is a foundation funded by the state which focuses on the capacity building of CSOs. During the past ten years it has had a strong impact on civil society providing more than 650 CSOs with financial support for building coalitions, establishing services and other developmental goals. Despite this impressive record its core annual budget has remained the same — below €1.3 million — for years. CSOs also complain that there is too much competition for grants and that inflation has decreased the value of those financial awards which are distributed.[11] For CSOs working in the fields of education, social welfare and culture, one of the main sources of support has been a Gambling Tax, which is discussed in greater detail below. Meanwhile, rural organisations can apply for grants from the LEADER programme which is funded by the European Union.

The amount fundraised by CSOs through donations and crowdfunding has risen over the past decade, as can been seen in Tables 3 and 4 below. In 2018 CSOs collected 40 million Euros in donations, although the amount given to individual CSOs varied considerably. The largest share of donations came from anonymous sources (40 %), followed by personal

9 Praxis, Guidelines for Funding Civil Society Organisations, (Praxis 2013), <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/guidance_document.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).
10 M. Lauring et al., *Variraport vabaühenduste riigieelarvest rahastamise juhendi järgimisest 2013-2015*, (EMSL 2016), <https://heakodanik.ee/sites/default/files/files/variraport.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).
11 USAID, 2017 *Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, pp. 81 – 88.

donors (31 %) and gifts from private companies (28 %).[12] A crowd-funding portal *Hooandja* was started in 2012 and by mid 2019 it had supported 138 civil society projects.[13] Smaller organisations also fundraise by organising sales, as well as mobilising communities and constituencies.

Table 3. Number of corporate and private givers 2011-2016

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corporate | 2013 | 2252 | 2496 | 2462 | 2663 | 2906 |
| Private | 39,452 | 42,823 | 44,499 | 58,744 | 64,575 | 71,030 |

Source: Kübar, U. (2017) 'Ülevaade: 10 fakti annetamisest Eestis ja mujal'. ERR

Table 4. Donations to CSOs (mil euro), corporate and private 2011-2016

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corporate | 7 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| Private | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Source: Kübar, U. (2017), 'Ülevaade: 10 fakti annetamisest Eestis ja mujal'. ERR

For years there were no signs of growth in corporate philanthropy in Estonia, but this appeared to change in 2018 with the establishment of two funds for this purpose. One was aimed at investing in educational innovation while the other was designed to support the development of those CSOs which had a positive social impact and potential for growth. Both funds are financed by entrepreneurs and managed by a CSO — the Good Deed Foundation.

Pressure to adapt to social change is one of the main challenges for CSOs. For example, it is no longer necessary for an individual to be a member of an organisation before they can become involved in its work. 41% of CSOs reported that they are not actively searching for new members, which is a significant decline.[14] Unexpectedly, the number of organisations involving volunteers is also decreasing (68% in 2014 as opposed to 53% in 2017), which might be a result of the professionalisation of CSOs, a lack of interest, or some other factor.[15]

Only 23% of CSOs have a paid workforce and according to official data 40,000 people worked in a non-profit organisation in 2017.[16] Overall employment in civil society has remained around 2% of the total workforce for many years.[17]

12 Data used is from the draft of *Civil Society Programme* (2021-2030), which is a government strategy for civil society development. It provides an analysis of the state of civil society and states the priorities for action for the government and civil society partners. As of June 2019, this document was still under consultation with a range of interest groups.
13 See for details <https://ngo.hooandja.ee/> (accessed 25 November 2019).
14 TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 U. Kübar, and A. Rammo., *23 küsimust Eesti vabakonna kohta ja vastused, nii hästi kui neid leida oskasime'* (EMSL, 2015), <https://heakodanik.ee/sites/default/files/files/2015-1%20almanahh.pdf> (accessed 25 November 2019).



Estonian CSOs have successfully advocated for, and built, a reliable infrastructure. CSOs, themselves approved a code of ethics in 2001 and it is still in use today. Over the years umbrella organisations have been established to represent common interests in almost every policy field and informal networks bring together actors for a certain cause or longer-term mission. Nonetheless, surveys indicate that in recent years there has been less networking among CSOs. Furthermore, the proportion of CSOs that are members of umbrella organisations has decreased from 46% to 39% while the proportion of CSOs that have regular partnerships has decreased from 89% to 69%.[18]

All this data suggests that there are growing divides within the CSO sector as a whole. Some CSOs have more capacity to involve volunteers, create partnerships and fundraise while others find it hard to compete with those organisations which are more established. Those CSOs which are not able to innovate on a range of different levels find it hard to compete with those organisations which have outstanding leadership and methods of engagement. It is a similar situation in terms of engagement. The CSOs that have networks, a positive record, and a stable budget are better placed to start new projects and attract experts and volunteers. Furthermore, not all groups in society are involved in CSOs equally. For example, the potential of both young people and the elderly is not being fully utilised at the moment.[19]

## Legal framework and political conditions

The legal environment in Estonia is supportive of CSO activity. CSO registration is easy and they can operate freely and address matters of public debate without harassment. The law allows CSOs to engage in a wide range of activities and permits them to develop their own internal governance rules. The legislative and regulatory framework also provides some special assistance, such as tax incentives for public benefit organisations. This is regardless of their affiliation or the nature of their activities.[20]

However, recent reports suggest that both the legal environment governing the sector and current funding mechanisms have failed to adapt to the needs of CSOs. For example, tax benefits have remained unchanged or even been reduced while incentives do not encourage large donations or strategic philanthropy. Furthermore, there has been a lack of innovative administrative policy development to introduce cross-sectoral cooperation formats, such as social investment bonds.[21]

Estonia is one of 76 countries which have joined the Open Government Partnership and to date it has fulfilled three activity plans. However, independent rapporteurs have stated that there was limited appetite for bolder reforms which might engage more people in public policy processes. CSOs complain that the current structures aimed at enhancing public involvement do not function properly and that there is little political desire for policies which might improve participation. Furthermore, it seems that government committees often pay lip-service to the process with no real results. This is the opposite of what CSOs want as they expect the public sector to engage them earlier and to prioritise an ongoing dialogue.[22]

18 TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS.
19 Civil Society Programme 2021-2030.
20 USAID, 2017 *Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, pp. 81 – 88.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

Still, several excellent initiatives have introduced innovative methods of deliberation and problem solving, which utilise the current favourable infrastructure for citizen action. In 2017 a citizen assembly considered how society might cope with an ageing population. Two years later a different citizen assembly sought to find common ground in what was an emotional debate about the future of forests. A democracy festival, the *Arvamusfestival*, aimed at fostering a culture of discussions, has for seven years hosted around 10,000 participants. Furthermore, since 2008 around 50,000 people every year have participated in a specially organised clean-up day involving a wide range of community activities. Even more remarkable is that this movement has spread all over the globe with millions of people engaged in more than one hundred countries and is now known as World Cleanup Day. The citizen initiative portal enables citizens to compile and send collective petitions to the legislature and is gaining popularity. At the same time, increasing numbers of local governments are experimenting with participatory budgeting.[23] Many of these examples have been successful through the exemplary use of IT technologies to help mobilise, coordinate complicated tasks, and communicate.

The ability of local governments to involve CSOs and to cooperate with them is rather low.[24] One of the reasons for this might be a 2017 administrative reform, which reduced the number of local municipalities from 218 to 79, in order to strengthen local leadership and financial capacities, and to improve the quality of service provision. However, these new administrative units still face the same challenges of developing structures and strategies for community involvement, including in terms of funding.

State funding of civil society is also undergoing change. More funds are being distributed through procurement, rather than grant-funded projects. While procurements allow CSOs more flexibility in budgeting, their focus is more fixed and there is more emphasis on price than quality. Furthermore, the amount of money which can be used for investment is rather small and the current rate of fees do not take into account the extra input needed to grow social capital. Competing at tenders requires certain levels of professionalism. The Gambling Tax reform of 2018 should improve sustainability for those CSOs defined as strategic partners for the ministries but may cut funding for others.

Activism is becoming more visible. For example, feminist groups organised the first Women's March in January 2019 as a move of solidarity to get attention for gender issues. Many young Estonians joined the Climate Strike movement and have protested in larger towns to pressure politicians into taking bolder decisions and faster action on climate change. One of the motivating factors for demonstrators has been the new political reality as Estonian society becomes increasingly polarised.

Parliamentary elections in March 2019 resulted in a conservative governing coalition, involving the nationalist right-wing party EKRE (Conservative People's Party of Estonia). It is opposed to immigration, supports what it calls traditional family values, stresses the importance of national interests, and is opposed to the European Union. Even before the elections EKRE opposed those CSOs working in a range of fields including LGBT rights, minorities, human rights, and the environment. The leaders of EKRE have also campaigned against the mainstream media, insulted members of academia, and insisted on changes in institutional leadership.

23 See for details <https://rahvaalgatus.ee> (accessed 25 November 2019).
24 TLÜ, IBS, Turu-uuringute AS.



Those opposed to the views or rhetoric of the new government have mobilised in several movements. "My Estonia Too" (*Kõigi Eesti*), started as a social media campaign to stand for a caring, respectful, dignified, successful and inclusive country full of opportunities. A protest movement "Yes to freedom, no to lies" (*Jah vabadusele, ei valedele!*) organises public meetings and mobilises people against government decisions. Small groups of people have protested every week outside the headquarters of the government. Journalists have spoken out publicly against accusations of bias while scientists have protested against the new government's withdrawal from an agreement signed by all larger political parties before the elections to raise state funding for science. Groups backing the government have also mobilised mainly speaking out in social media, but they have also gathered for meetings.

The new Coalition Agreement and Government Working Plan does not pose a direct threat to CSOs or civic engagement at large. Indeed, the new coalition wants to reform legislation on civic initiatives, creating more possibilities for referenda and introducing binding petitions. Critics argue that this promise is just populism rather than a sincere will to improve participation or listen to the people. Some CSOs are concerned that the achievements made so far in the development of civil society might turn out to be fragile as collaboration is built on trust and social capital with minimal regulations. That might change if political leaders are not willing to accept CSOs as partners or co-operate with them.

Growing opposition to liberal democracy, mistrust in public institutions and polarisation in society indicate that there are questions of social interaction, principles and values that are not debated enough nor agreed upon in society at large. All of that emphasises the important role of civil society, which can reach out and build bridges, grow social capital and continue with needed public debate.

## Challenges: New realities to cope with and to benefit from

Twelve representatives of CSOs were interviewed for this study. The CSOs concerned were registered nongovernmental and non-profit organisations. Most of the respondents stated that civil society sustainability has improved during three years (except two, who stated that it has remained the same). Most considered current trends in infrastructure and volunteering as positive (except for two respondents who thought them to be neutral). The highest number of negative assessments were regarding trends in private giving (four out of 12), mixed assessments were given to organisational capacity (five positive, five neutral and two negative) and state funding (two positive, five neutral, two negative and three leaving it without an assessment). The results are similar to the USAID Civil Society Sustainability Index reports with high scores for infrastructure and lower marks for financial and organisational capacity of CSOs.

The main challenges outlined by the respondents were related to funding civic action, mobilisation of supporters, professionalisation of the sector, and public discourse regarding civil society.

### Changing nature of funding civic action

Sources of income can offer the most important indications about the sustainability and viability of CSOs. The funding possibilities and structure of budgets of CSOs in Estonia are currently undergoing major change. Almost all representatives of the CSOs described their

search for a new balance between support from public budgets and private giving, citing concerns about managing with less support from public funds and the challenges of encouraging donations. As one respondent observed:

> "questions of resources still hold us back. OK, there is money that you need. But... it is not just that you need money - you need to keep growing and keep the people in your team... You constantly have to find additional sources for paying the salaries that your people deserve. And this holds us back the most. Otherwise the environment is just fine but the full potential of CSOs is not being realised." (Interview EE10)

Several respondents indicated how hard it is to reduce reliance on public money while sticking to strategic priorities. Below are comments from two of them:

> "it has been our focus for the last six years, certainly the only thing that needs to get done - to get these two things (communication, financial independence) working properly. We need to become independent from political manipulation." (Interview EE12)

> "if your income is just from paid services, it is difficult to cover advocacy tasks. The pricing has to be done in a way that it [selling services] enables you to dedicate the right amount of resources, not just to cover the salary of a person directly responsible for the service, but even then the amount of money you can put aside for advocacy work is still limited." (Interview EE10)

Several respondents indicated their concern about changes in financial support from public budgets, either because of government driven reforms, or due to the fact that funding practices are becoming more fixed and targeted. Here are two such responses:

> "currently the state of funding is positive but the future is questionable. ...The authorities started reforming the Gambling Tax, with no CSOs consulted and we were just faced with a fact that the new terms do not list the specific area of our activity... The Ministry is counting on us and what we do is their priority, but as we are not listed in the law we do not know what will happen next year." (Interview EE3)

> "these projects have their own terms such as only addressing certain target groups...we have to invest an enormous amount of energy to reach them, but project budgets do not support the extra effort you make... so the funding is available but it sets limits on what we can and have to do." (Interview EE2)



### Changing nature of participation

Declining membership and/or difficulties in recruiting fully committed team-members are issues that respondents were concerned about. As one stated:

> "we have more than 2000 members, but our development scenarios foresee reaching up to 4000. It is not easy. Being involved in a youth organisation as a member is not as popular as it used to be 10 to 15 years ago although we know that there are young people interested in what we do." (Interview EE5)

> "what I see is... people are getting tired and the younger generation are not as interested as we are in what we are doing... They have other interests... animals, innovation, urban movements... But that means we lack fresh ideas and people." (Interview EE12)

Although civil society actors understand that involvement can take diverse forms, public policies and regulations still emphasise membership which may hinder CSOs' search for new ways of engaging communities. As one respondent stated:

> "we are an umbrella organisation and we had one new member organisation last year, which means we have grown. However, we see several of our member organisations fading... But as our grants depend on the number of members, we have to focus on that." (Interview EE7)

Several respondents have tried to address this challenge through research and devel-opment. Questions are being asked about the definition and the role of volunteers and more suitable models of engagement are being introduced in organisations. As two respondents observed:

> "what I have also noticed, and what I sense is that... volunteers' expectations of our organisation and its management are higher. That is normal as CSOs have developed in recent years. If I just think about the time when I started and where we are now, it has been an extremely fast development." (Interview EE11)

> "CSOs have been trained in leadership based on models that are suitable for private companies. That is how many – especially more capable organisations - have become extremely effective and professional. However, this means they involve fewer people in what they do, and are increasingly distant from civil society. I think that this is one of the worst things that has happened to Estonian civil society – there are fewer and fewer members and increasingly more volunteers. The whole model of volunteerism, that has been introduced... is to see the volunteer as a client, whose involvement is described as a process." (Interview EE8)

### External and internal demand for professionalism

The changing environment, growth of CSOs and professionalism have all necessitated re-form in everyday practices. Analyses of the sector describe how the difference be-tween capable and less sustainable CSOs is growing. Those that adapt to the changing environ-ment and are open to new models of action are better off. Still, the process of reforming tried and tested ways may be difficult, even painful. It needs new strategies and manage-ment skills according to some of those interviewed for this study:

> "they [the Ministry] expect us to be stronger in our advoca-cy work. Yet, we do not have the resources. We do not know where to find them and we have not found ways of working more broadly, inspiring our member organisations to be more active in their communities, and involving more peo-ple in different activities." (Interview EE2)

> "we started as a nano-organisation and have grown into micro-CSO and it has forced us to change. It has made me to change... It also means that people in a team need to grow professionally. I know that we need to grow talents in our team." (Interview EE10)

> "for the first six years my home was our office. For meet-ings we rented a tent and the main aim for us was to get our own space. Now we don't need a meeting room, but to develop a whole organisation around that meeting place." (Interview EE9)

### Growing polarisation and mixed expectations of CSOs

Public opinion regarding CSOs has become more polarised than ever before. CSOs which work in the field of human rights, are experiencing obstacles in their work according to this respondent:

> "I cannot say how public opinion affects other CSOs, but for us it is quite a sensitive issue... For us it is not so easy to go to a public event for fundraising, and that is a chal-lenge for us. It is harder for us to provide services, and that hinders our organisational development." (Interview EE1)

There are also CSOs, which have discovered positive sides of the new reality of emo-tional public debates:

> "public opinion is extremely polarised, but I would say that is a positive development. Due to the new situation some people who used to be rather neutral, have figured out that it is really a good thing to have organisations like us... Each time this government member threatens us, donations flow into our account. We do not need a major fundraising campaign, he does it for us!" (Interview EE3)



> "The rise of far right extremists has favoured our growth – it is much easier for us to explain to our stakeholders why we are needed. Before, when we started, issues around open society and governance were kind of boring. But now there are more people who understand that if we do not deal with these problems (open society, governance) in the first place, other problems cannot be solved later." (Interview EE8)

## Solutions: Self-reliance, innovation and the art of cooperation

The representatives of the CSOs interviewed for this study also outlined some of their strat-egies for addressing the challenges described above. The increased proportion of private money going to CSOs is probably equally the result of a growing culture of giving as well as improved fundraising practices. CSOs with an open-minded leadership, desire for so-cial impact, and which have the skills to deliver are looking for new ways to manage their organisations.

### Active fundraising, paid services and closer relations with constituencies

CSOs have found new methods for earning income, are more proactive in fundraising, and are using new technologies. Several respondents mentioned how they have developed on-line services and other income streams. One described how:

> "we have opened a new e-store and we also plan to devel-op our own brand, in order to increase sales. We have been in contact with our supporters and asked about what can we do to make donating to us more simple and convenient. It is all about making fundraising diverse, so that we are not dependent on project grants. We have also developed our own services – there is new thematic training that we offer and new target groups we have selected." (Interview EE1)

> "we have developed our platform for donations and an e-store, which will be opened this year. We believe this will help us to move forward with our fundraising." (Interview EE12)

Respondents have also thought about ways to improve accountability when using public funds. One of those interviewed made this commitment:

> "what will definitely change is that everything will be much more systematic. CSOs which want to be funded by the state have to be ready to show the results of their work. We have started to take it more seriously and recorded our activities, so we can show what we have achieved." (Inter-view EE7)

### Power of cooperation

Most of the representatives stated that their CSOs have boosted co-operation with a range of actors in response to the challenges facing the sector. Many focused on establishing contacts with the public sector, especially local municipalities, which are often reluctant to initiate cooperation with CSOs. As one respondent observed:

> "we do not just wait for somebody to contact us, we are the ones that start a dialogue - send a draft of contract, attend meetings to explain what we do and what is going on… we do not resort to criticism, instead we try to understand why there are constraints, and then search for solutions within these constraints… not everyone gets support from the public purse, and some are angry. But I suggest it is better for all parties concerned to meet up and talk." (Interview EE6)

Others mentioned the case for increased co-operation within the CSO sector as a way of achieving greater impact with fewer resources. Below are comments from two respondents:

> "I think this is a rather good example of us working in the same sector. Our target group is largely the same and we can join forces, do something awesome and if it works out everybody wins." (Interview EE11)

> "we have started to do more cooperation projects with other organisations so that our competence is just one component of a larger strategy." (Interview EE10)

Another approach towards effective co-operation was to think about ways to initiate and support networking among CSOs. This was especially the case for umbrella organisations, or organisations which had specific expertise which benefit others. As two respondents noted:

> "we have tried these discussions among our members – invited everybody and discussed what we could do so that we could support each other more… we have tried to increase networking so that when somebody organises training or a seminar and there is room for more, they could invite people from other organisations." (Interview EE7)

> "I think that for us the most important thing is that we see how the issues we work with are gaining importance. Especially among young people. And the question is how to make use of it. How can we involve the people who consider environmental issues important? Can we do something to support young climate activists? Do we have activities that they could join? We really want them to be inspired. We do not want to interfere and take credit for their work but we would like to search for ways to be of mutual assistance." (Interview EE10)

The quality of Estonian CSO involvement in the international civil society community is rising. Contacts, new technologies, and professional expertise have allowed CSOs to mobilise finances and integrate cross-border cooperation. CSOs value inspiration, solutions to practical dilemmas, and opportunity to advocate for better policies. One respondent was full of praise for this approach:

> "we have only had positive experiences. We meet every year with our Nordic colleagues – inform each other about what is on the agenda, but this network also works as part of a wider pan-European organisation. So that when more important issues are debated in Europe we meet up with Baltic Sea partners and formulate our position." (Interview EE2)

### Professionalism and quality in leadership

Trying to increase professionalism in the sector is a significant challenge as more organisations look for ways to be more effective in what they do. Respondents described different strategies that were characteristic of professional leadership, but most of all illustrated their willingness to find solutions through organisational capacity building. Below are three examples:

> "we have started to take things very seriously, in terms of mobilising ourselves. When we started, our profile was bigger and more powerful than we actually were. Now we systemise what we do… we have been very clear about what we want to achieve but also about what we can do and what we cannot." (Interview EE3)

> "we started building a new strategy… you need to understand how to manage a growing organisation. It is difficult but also fun. As we grow, more people have to take responsibility and deal with new challenges, and it can be very motivating… more people need to take a leading role and need to achieve greater independence." (Interview EE10)

> "one of our challenges is managing volunteers… so that they can support the vision of the management team. Another challenge is communication, which is actually mostly done by volunteers. The point is that we need to be more open to volunteers, we have to listen to them and involve them in the process of (communication) strategy development… and this is all related to fundraising, as all the stories we tell (including the volunteers) must reach our supporters." (Interview EE11)

### Engaging the community

One response to the challenges of declining membership is to build stronger relationships with different communities. The main idea is becoming more informal, more open to the public and open to different forms of participation. Below are some comments from two of the respondents on this issue:

"one of our ideas was to organise events for our network where we do not discuss practical issues regarding a certain project or train our members. I really would like to start something like a development programme, to bring them together, involve them in discussions on a joint platform." (Interview EE2)

"what else is interesting is that we have these new followers, who have not joined as members, but who are with us through social media and these are young people who comment and even come to our events. I cannot call it an informal network, but they are with us… we have different events every week, and quite a lot take part, but do not join as members. In fact, we do not require them to be members." (Interview EE7)

Although some critics of civil society professionalism argue that CSOs are losing contact with their constituencies, some respondents described how they have started to invest in empowering constituencies as part of a specific agenda. As one respondent put it:

"everything about community building has been on our agenda for at least the past year, if not longer… first we started a radio broadcast in addition to writing articles. Then we decided, that as we did not even have an office we needed a physical space for meetings… and the other thing is that we have quite a lot of people who put forward proposals about what we should do. In the last 6-8 months we have stressed in our communications that we do offer space and even some finances for all worthy ideas. But you have to come yourself and do it." (Interview EE3)

## Conclusions

This report has provided a general overview of the state of civil society in Estonia, illustrated with insights from practitioners about the challenges they face and best practices they use to cope with difficulties. In general, interviews indicated a move towards greater independence within the sector, but also pointed to several new or continuously unanswered needs that hinder the growth of civil society such as weak sectorial infrastructure, uncertainty of political support, and growing differences within the sector.

Most of the challenges described in interviews relate to the responses of CSOs to the changes in the environment in which they operate. Certain interviews highlighted how some CSOs have grown professionally in recent years. They rely strongly on their drive to achieve and on their own efforts when generating new strategies for raising funds, engaging in policy-dialogue, or responding to community needs. They value the supportive infrastructure which has enabled Estonian CSOs to expand but also emphasised their own choices and reforms. Not everyone was in agreement and some complained about what they saw as a lack of resources and political support.

The gap between capable and less-capable organisations in Estonian civil society is growing. This has been noted in several studies including this one. Of course civil society is diverse but differences within the sector complicate valid assessments and make it harder to design policies that consider the whole range of CSOs. This, in turn, slowly decreases access to resources for those left behind. For example, local studies suggest that there is less cooperation among CSOs, as well as between civil society and the public sector. However, interviewees for this study were mostly open to cooperation and described how they work on networking strategies and collaboration skills because "*that is what they need in order to have results and impact*." (Interview EE6)

Another controversy is that civil society is expected to take a leading role in social innovation, but fails to do that for several reasons. Experts in the focus group agreed that funding and impact measurement mechanisms are not in place to support that expectation. There is not enough capability, be it financial or political, within the public sector to test, assess and adopt solutions introduced by civil society. As a result efforts for social change do not deliver.

All of that highlights a need for redefining and reorganising the relationship between the public sector and CSOs and also the capacity building measures provided for CSOs. These have remained relatively unchanged since the approval of EKAK in 2002. Even more important is finding a way to increase social and political demand from citizens and politicians in order to drive public institutions and policies to change, to recognise the role and value of active citizenship, and to hold government accountable.

The current political situation, including the polarisation of Estonian society, has added another dimension to this issue. Although some respondents noted that rhetoric opposing equality, liberal democracy and at least part of civil society has helped them to gain supporters, they are not sure about the future. A sense of uncertainty was evident among all interviewees, even those giving high scores for the wider sustainability of the sector. Most expressed their fear of slowly shrinking civic space, others referred to an unpredictable future but none had experienced real exclusion. In October a radical conservative party in the government started a public debate about state support for the LGBT community, questioning if government funding should be accessible to all CSOs.

It is not yet clear if the foundations of civil society in Estonia are strong enough to withstand this turbulence and maintain social cohesion. The study suggests that many principles of a democratic society, such as equal rights, citizen involvement, civil society and its role have not been debated thoroughly enough. The same concern was raised in a focus group, which also referred to a crucial need for civic education and awareness initiatives to be incorporated in educational and civil society strategies.

Furthermore, in the longer term, there is certainly a need for a strategy to fight mistrust and enhance bridging between different groups of Estonian society. It is clear that civil society should take a lead. As one of the respondents noted: "*It is the main challenge we need to work on, otherwise it will not be possible to solve any of the other problems in our society.*" (Interview EE8)

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## List of interviews

Interview EE1: National CSO, human rights organisation
Interview EE2: National CSO, informal education network
Interview EE3: Community CSO, human rights platform
Interview EE4: International CSO, democracy development
Interview EE5: National CSO, youth and hobby organisation
Interview EE6: National CSO, animal protection services
Interview EE7: Local CSO, disabled people
Interview EE8: International CSO, democracy and youth
Interview EE9: Local CSO, community development
Interview EE10: National CSO, environmental expert organisation
Interview EE11: National CSO, charity working with health issues
Interview EE12: National CSO, internal security

## List of focus group participants, 23 May 2019[25]

Manager, National Foundation for Civil Society
Adviser, Government Office
Consultant for local CSOs, Regional Development Centres
Manager, Social Enterprise Network
Adviser, Ministry of Culture
Manager, Good Deed Foundation
Researchers, Tallinn University and Turu-uuringute AS
Advisers on civil society, Ministry of Interior

25 The focus group was organised with a group of experts involved in the Steering Committee for the next period of the Civil Society Programme (2021-2030). It is affiliated to the Ministry of Interior.

# Slovakia

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# Slovakia: The search for funding and improved public image

By Mária Murray Svidroňová

## Civil society overview

Different political regimes (e.g. monarchy in Austro-Hungarian Empire, communism in Czechoslovakia) have all had an impact on civil society and the development of the non-profit sector in what is now modern day Slovakia (Svidroňová & Vaceková 2016). None more so than the Communist regime which systematically destroyed many CSOs and came close to eradicating civil society altogether (Strečanský 2017).

The end of Communist rule in 1989 combined with political and economic reforms led to a resurgence in civil society and the entry of private institutions, including non-profit organisations, into the economy. By 1993, nearly 6,000 non-profit organisations were registered and just three years later that number had doubled (Kuvíková & Svidroňová 2010).

The period after EU accession in 2004 saw an increase in the activities of CSOs as well as some changes in their relationships with government and business. CSOs faced a range of challenges. These included defining their relationship with the state, helping to drive reform, providing constructive criticism, welfare service provision, and developing an improved framework for civil society.

Since 2010, Slovak society has become increasingly polarised. Issues such as human rights, family values, LGBT rights, migration and corruption have all proved extremely divisive. This has had an impact on CSOs, which are often at the forefront of campaigning on these questions.

Nonetheless, during this time there has also been visible growth in CSO activity in areas such as urban community organising, neighbourhood initiatives and public space rehabilitation through civic initiatives (USAID 2017). CSOs have been responsible for many social innovations in the fields of urban development and housing, healthcare, social services, education and the environment (Nemec et al. 2015). There has also been an increase in number of cultural and art initiatives in the public spaces and the public sphere.

### CSOs in numbers

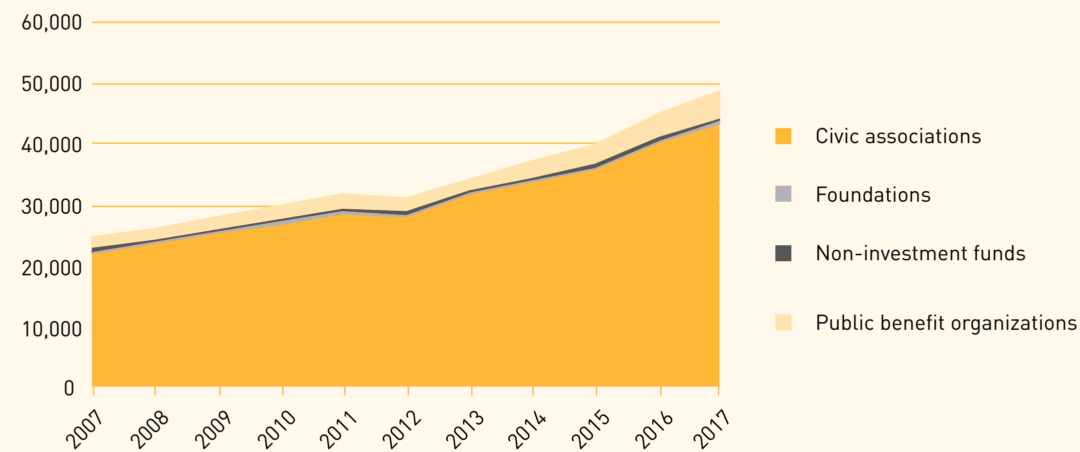
Government figures suggest that there were 64,136 non-profit organisations in Slovakia in 2017.[1] Of these, there were a total of 49,049 CSOs which are relevant to this study — 43,544 civic associations, 3,071 public benefit organisations (PBO), 518 non-investment funds and 469 foundations.[2][3] This is outlined in Figure 1 below.

1 Specific surveys are mainly carried out by the Statistical Office although the Interior Ministry also has some data on CSOs. However, there is currently no authoritative source of data on CSOs.

2 Under Slovak law an association of citizens is defined as an organisation established by at least 3 citizens in order to pursue the goals set out in their statute. See <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/99932/119583/F-255803203/SVK99932%20Eng.pdf> (accessed 01 June 2019).

3 Public benefit organisations are groups established with the aim of providing services to benefit the public as outlined in law. See <https://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/3854> (accessed 01 June 2019).

Fig.1. CSOs in numbers, 2007-2017




Source: own, based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Full data on the breakdown of CSOs by field of activity is currently not available. The Statistical Office and the Ministry of Interior hold some information but it is inconsistent and only covers certain types of CSOs. However, in January 2019, a new law came into force which will enable the collection of much more information on CSOs and this data should be available during or after 2020.

Official statistics are available for the number of employees and volunteers in CSOs based on sector but this data includes organisations such as churches and trade unions which do not fall within the remit of this study. These caveats aside, these figures can still offer some insights into the CSO workforce in Slovakia.

For example, as of 2017 there were 13,106 employees in CSOs offering education services. Meanwhile, employment in CSOs providing social services almost doubled from 4013 in 2013 to 7,808 in 2017. There has also been growth in the number of people working for membership organisations such as professional associations and youth movements.

There are also government statistics on CSO employment which are broken down by the specific legal status of the organisation, as outlined in Table 1 below. This data suggests that PBOs have the highest number of employees but this is due to the fact that civic associations, which are the most common CSO, are usually staffed by unpaid members and volunteers.

4 Employees are defined as individuals working on regular contracts. Casual workers are defined as individuals who perform work based on different type of agreements as set out in the Labour Code. See <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/praca-zamestnanost/vztah-zamestnanca-zamestnavatela/zakonnik-prace/zakonnik-prace-anglicka-verzia-labour-code-full-wording-2012.pdf> (accessed 01 June 2019).

Table 1. Number of employees (FTE), casual workers4 and volunteers in CSOs according to their legal status

| Legal status | Type of workforce | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Civic association | Avg. no of employees | 3414 | 7674 | 7473 | 9415 | 10,728 |
| | Casual workers | 20,440 | 43,357 | 44,159 | 25,997 | 13,424 |
| | Volunteers | 311,648 | 224,933 | 254,673 | 255,942 | 197,991 |
| Foundation | Avg. no of employees | 132 | 132 | 143 | 221 | 143 |
| | Casual workers | 787 | 491 | 799 | 211 | 261 |
| | Volunteers | 1510 | 3313 | 1006 | 871 | 983 |
| Non-investment fund | Avg. no of employees | 22 | 17 | 2 | 0 | 23 |
| | Casual workers | 183 | 34 | 69 | 3 | 7 |
| | Volunteers | 2419 | 1406 | 1485 | 1774 | 2300 |
| Public benefit organisation | Avg. no of employees | 18,540 | 18,641 | 19,520 | 22,234 | 22,437 |
| | Casual workers | 14,313 | 11,746 | 13,714 | 16,131 | 12,246 |
| | Volunteers | 11,735 | 14,806 | 20,884 | 25,809 | 28,563 |

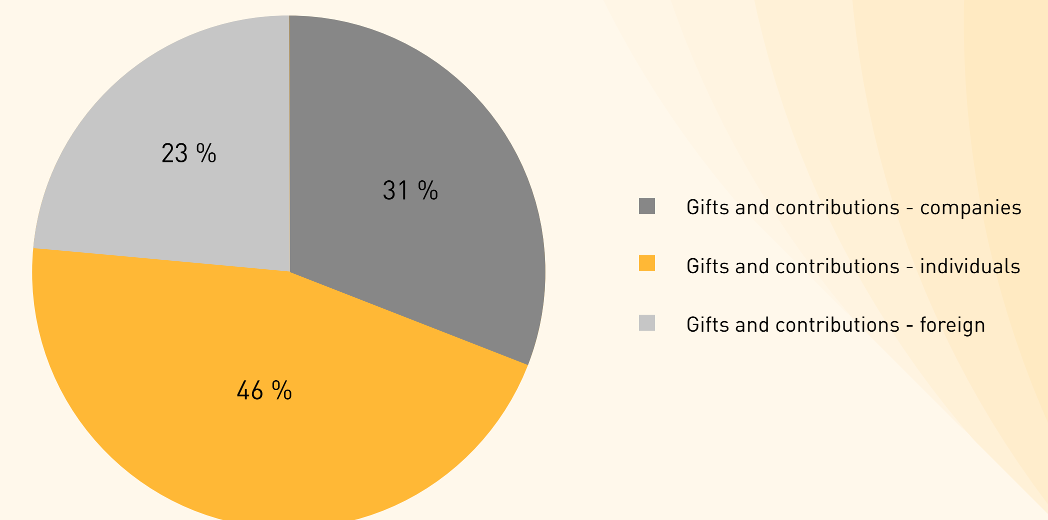
Source: own, based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

## CSO funding

Public funding is an important source of income for CSOs in Slovakia. In 2013, this amounted to almost 273 million Euros (Svidroňová & Kuvíková 2014). In 2016, CSOs received nearly 80 million Euros in state subsidies and transfers alone (Štátny záverečný účet 2016). Government statistics suggest that in 2016 the state provided 953 million Euros to non-profit institutions but as this includes organisations such as churches it is not clear how much was received by CSOs, as defined in this report.

Public funding aside, CSOs have also received grants from both foreign and Slovak foundations. Separately, in 2017 alone, CSOs received gifts and contributions totalling 257 million Euros, which included 117 million Euros from individuals, 79 million Euros from companies and 60 million Euros from overseas.

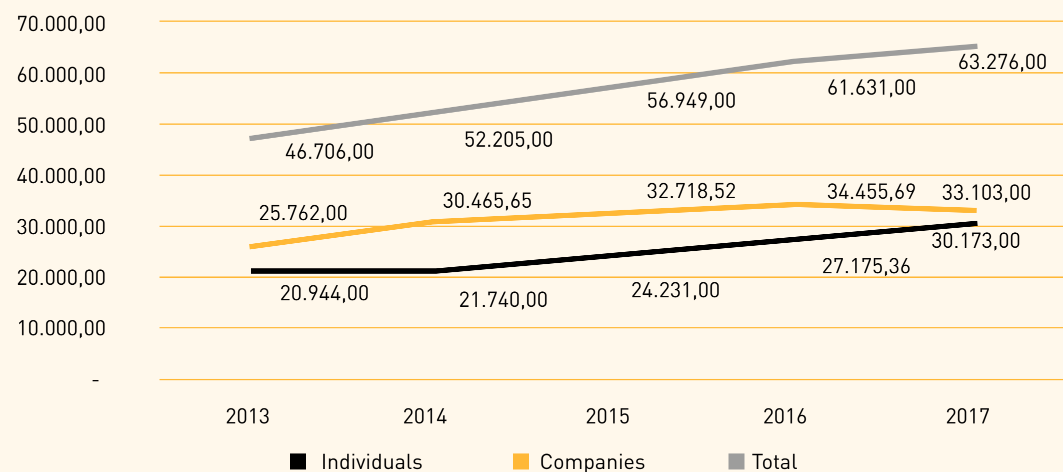
Fig. 2. Gifts and contributions for CSOs in 2017




Source: own, based on data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Approximately 6-10% of CSO revenue comes from donations through the tax system (Molokáč & Hagara 2015). Under a scheme known as tax assignation companies and their employees can assign a share of their income tax to the CSO of their choice rather than handing it over to the state. This obviously benefits CSOs but there are still a considerable number of taxpayers who do not take advantage of this opportunity.

Fig. 3. Development of tax assignation (in thousands of Euros)




Source: own, based on data from the Institute for Financial Policy

CSO funding is primarily project-based so resources are often not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. Thus, CSOs sometimes look to other sources of income such as crowd-funding platforms, where either big, well-known CSOs or popular topics succeed. A recent report from USAID found that crowdfunding was not effective for initiatives which might be perceived as being controversial, such as LGBT rights or support for the Roma community. However, other projects have been successful, such as those addressing human rights or corruption (USAID 2017).

Overall, CSO funding has been fairly stable with little change in the proportion of public, private and self-generated income over the past decade. Despite the accessibility of resources, CSOs still remain underfunded as current financial support is not enough to satisfy demand, especially in the social services sector.

## Legal framework and political conditions

In Slovakia, as elsewhere, the influence of the far right has been growing. One early indication of this came with the election in 2013 of the far right politician, Marian Kotleba, as governor of the region of Banská Bystrica. He stopped funding to several local non-profit organisations involved in cultural and human rights work. In the national election of 2016, his political party won just over eight percent of the vote, gaining fourteen seats in parliament. This was subsequently reduced to thirteen when one parliamentarian left the party in November 2018. Kotleba and other politicians who share his agenda have sought to discredit civil society activity and delegitimise CSOs which receive overseas funding, decrying them as "foreign agents" and proposing legislation to penalise them.



The situation deteriorated in February 2018 after the murders of an investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée.[5] The killings caused shock throughout the country, sparking nationwide protests, in which CSOs were involved, and a political crisis which culminated in the resignation of the Prime Minister, Robert Fico, and his entire cabinet in March 2018. In November of the same year, members of the main organisation behind the demonstrations, "*Za slušné Slovensko*" (For a decent Slovakia), were investigated by the country's National Crime Agency on the grounds that they had "organised a coup funded by George Soros in order to destabilise the country."[6][7] This appeared to be an attempt to intimidate the organisers of the protests by their opponents in the political establishment. The investigation failed to prove any wrongdoing but the entire episode reduced already low levels of trust between politicians and civil society activists.

Most CSOs do not tend to get involved in politics but they are frequently called upon as a source of expertise and credible information for both local and central governments. However, the authorities often take advantage CSOs. For example, experts are asked to provide their services free of charge or for minimal fees. CSOs also often provide pro bono services that benefit the government such as helping to draft policy or legislation.

Several civil society leaders have entered local or national politics. The highest profile example is the current president, Zuzana Čaputová, who was elected to office in March 2019, becoming the country's first female leader. President Čaputová has a record of environmental activism and she was also involved in the nationwide protests following the murder of Jan Kuciak.

While the political situation for CSOs appears to somewhat fluid, the legal framework for civil society is considered to be relatively stable (USAID 2017). In 2018, legislative reforms were passed aimed at growing the number of social enterprises and CSOs. They also established the first official register of CSOs operating in Slovakia and introduced initiatives to raise public awareness about CSOs and their activities.

There are different rules for the formation of a CSO depending on its legal status. These are outlined in Table 3 below. All CSOs are registered at the Ministry of Interior in a process that takes a maximum of 30 days.

Table 2. Rules for the establishment of CSOs in Slovakia

| **Type of organisation** | **Civic association** | **Foundation** | **Public benefit organization** | **Non-investment fund** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Founder | At least 3 persons, at least one of them must be 18 | Natural person or legal entity | Natural person or legal entity or state | Natural person or legal entity |
| Capital | None | At least 6,638 € (minimum 663€ per founder) | None | At least 66€ per founder |

Source: own, based on information provided by the Ministry of Interior

5 'Death of Investigative Journalist Sparks Mass Protests in Slovakia', *The Guardian*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/09/death-of-investigative-journalist-sparks-mass-protests-in-slovakia> (accessed 01 June 2019).

6 The initiative is an informal network of active citizens in all regions of Slovakia who started organising after the murders. The killings triggered protests about a range of issues including corruption, education and policing.

7 'Fair-Play Alliance watchdog submits a criminal complaint against Fico', *The Slovak* Spectator, 15 November 2018, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20962556/fair-play-alliance-watchdog-submits-a-criminal-complaint-against-fico.html> (accessed 25 November 2019).

There are no specific regulations for the employment of paid staff in CSOs and the same rules apply for these organisations as for companies. Volunteering for CSOs is regulated by a range of ordinances which cover issues such as the legal status of volunteers and their roles and responsibilities. The most important is the Act 406/2011 on Volunteering, but there are also other laws (e.g. the Act on Employment no. 5/2004 Coll. and the Act on Sport no. 440/2015 Coll.) which define special types of volunteering such as when a volunteer can be paid (which is contradictory to the definition of volunteering as such). Therefore an amendment is being prepared to unify the meaning of volunteering.

## Challenges: Funding, organisational capacities and image

In interviews representatives from CSOs identified three key challenges - funding, staffing and the current political climate.

### Funding

All respondents stated that funding was a perennial problem. Most pointed out that the number of CSOs is growing, but the available funding has not. As one put it:

> "financial sustainability is a permanent challenge for CSOs. Large and stable organisations are also addressing this issue in the long term, especially in relation to covering administrative costs. Another challenge is the overall change in the financial environment. An important source of income has been the system of tax assignation but now more and more companies are using this to set up their own corporate foundations." (Interview SK3)

This has in turn reduced the financial support available to CSOs. The challenge with funding is perceived by one respondent as:

> "an endless merry-go-round where you have to think at least a year in advance and strategically plan multi-source funding, and have different options if you don't get a grant. Also, the problem is that most grants do not cover labour costs, so we use mostly voluntary work to carry out our activities." (Interview SK14)

Several interviewees also stated that there is little funding available to support paid employees which hampers both the professionalisation of CSOs and their sustainability.

> Respondents identified two further problems with funding. The first is non-transparent criteria with one representative commenting that, "the criteria for selecting projects are not entirely clear or sufficiently transparent. There is no feedback if a project proposal is rejected." (Interview SK4)

The second issue is perceived "misuse" of the system. One CSO representative noted that:

> "there are also CSOs which just write projects. They know how to get EU funds and other projects but these have a minimal impact on civil society. For example, they do two or three obligatory activities and then just print information leaflets but this is not a sufficient tool to enact real change." (Interview SK5)

There also appears to be a specific problem with funding in the provision of social services. One respondent complained that:

> "fiscal decentralisation has not been done properly, with the result that important competencies were transferred from the state to local governments, but the conditions for funding and addressing fundamental and complex issues have not been solved. Thus, the state virtually exempts itself from all responsibility for not addressing the conditions for many groups in society." (Interview SK8)

There are also challenges emerging around new issues such as crowdfunding and, in particular, corporate social responsibility (CSR). With the advent of new online funding platforms CSOs need to learn how to raise funds and how to "sell" an idea or innovation. There is also increasing demand from donors to see how their donations are being used. This means there is a need to measure impact, to quantify the work of CSOs, and to be able to provide arguments based on previous results. As for CSR, one respondent argued that:

> "despite companies having CSR, they do not know what to do with it. CSOs need to find ways to understand how the donor would like to support a particular idea. The donor needs to understand that it is not about quantity. Often it is necessary to explain regional differences. For example, a donor from the west of Slovakia may need to be shown that in the east of the country there is a different acute need and therefore it is necessary to change their original idea." (Interview SK10)

### Staffing

Many of the CSOs in the survey highlighted challenges surrounding human resources. Most CSOs stated that limited funding meant few employees with the inevitable result that staff found themselves multi-tasking. One respondent commented that:

> "it was challenging, first we had to stabilise the organisation and the programmes it was dedicated to, then we were able to create job positions so that it wasn't one person doing everything." (Interview SK1)

Another observed that:

> "finding good, qualified people is becoming increasingly complicated. At the same time, we are not able to offer them the same benefits as in the public and private sectors. We have the time to give them our guidance, but we cannot offer them job stability because we operate in environment of short-term contracts and self-employed contractors." (Interview SK3)

This challenge is exacerbated by current labour law because there are no exceptions for CSOs unless they are registered as social enterprises. As one respondent explained:

> "it is disadvantageous for CSOs to conclude employment contracts and agreements because of high wage deductions which means if we want to save money, we prefer self-employed workers. This is an issue for young people, who are just finishing school, who have a problem with being self-employed because they want to have a classic employment contract which gives them more security." (Interview SK1)

These problems are made worse by the fact that Slovakia is facing a brain drain as many people leave the country in search of better opportunities elsewhere. One respondent commented that their two main challenges are:

> "the combination of an outflow of smart people and a lack of funding. Actually, because of this, our organisational structure has changed as well. Previously we had five employees but now we have just two. The rest are external co-workers or volunteers, as we cannot provide stability. If there is a project where you can create a job, we can hire someone for about a year but that is not a sound long-term option." (Interview SK5)

This is also an issue with volunteers. Many young people volunteer during their studies but once they finish at university they either move abroad or start a family or career in Slovakia. According to one respondent there has been:

> "a visible decrease in real volunteers – they leave to study or work abroad, they start a family or they find new hobbies, they are interested only in the material, moral or career benefits of volunteering which are not as apparent as they get older." (Interview SK12)

Many respondents commented on the challenge of attempting to increase professionalisation in the CSO sector. As one noted:

> "the need for the professionalisation of CSOs is huge. There is a need for private resources, but CSOs must speak the language of business which they do not know how to due to the lack of professionalisation. These tools are missing – communication and presentation skills, research, data, management education and employee training." (Interview SK10)



Finally, the majority of those interviewed for this study pointed out that they have other employment and that CSOs are either a hobby or something they perceive as their personal mission - how they want to contribute to society. Therefore, time, or rather the lack of it, is also an issue for many who work or volunteer for CSOs. As one commented:

> "we lack the time to focus on all the activities we wish to address. That is why we have decided to concentrate only on the most important goals, which we believe have the greatest impact and are in line with our mission. This is understandable given that we are a small civic association with just three volunteers." (Interview SK2)

### Changing political climate and government attitudes

Most respondents also saw the current political climate as a major challenge. One respondent noted that:

> "growing political criticism is definitely one of the issues we are dealing with. At one time it was just the extremist political parties but now the mainstream ones have also taken up this narrative and are making negative comments about civil society and CSOs." (Interview SK7)

Another commented that:

> "the situation in Slovakia it is still better than in neighbouring countries such as Hungary and Poland but there is intense pressure on some types of organisations, mostly those dealing with human rights and LGBT issues." (Interview SK1)

In May 2019, the Minister of Culture stopped all grants from the ministry for LGBT organisations despite receiving positive commendations for their projects.[8]

One respondent also highlighted a new challenge:

> "some types of organisations such as think-tanks and advocacy groups are coming under intense pressure from a range of actors including populists, far-right politicians and the fake news media who are sharply defining themselves against CSOs and their actions." (Interview SK3)

For example, some opposition politicians have criticised the civic movement known as "Za slušné Slovensko" (For A Decent Slovakia) for being a front for political parties such as Progressive Slovakia and the former president, Andrej Kiska´s new "For People" party.

Finally, one further challenge is the government's tendency to think only in terms of projects and short term solutions. As one contributor complains:

8 Claudia Patricolo, 'Rights activists demand resignation of Slovak culture minister', *Emerging Europe*, 24 May 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/rights-activists-demand-resignation-of-slovak-culture-minister/> (accessed 01 June 2019).

> "there is a constant demand for innovation and innovative solutions but the reality is that many types of activities simply need to be repeated over the long term rather than changed. Also, there is little support for activities aimed at preventing the risks of social exclusion, such as family mediation, early intervention, preparation for the labour market, or various support services for people with specific needs. By the time we get to see these individuals they already have problems which are too difficult to resolve." (Interview SK8)

## Solutions: Diversify, educate, build the image

The organisations offered various responses or solutions to the challenges mentioned above. Below are some of the ones which resonated most strongly:

### Diversify to ensure stable funding

Several authors have argued that diversification of funding takes too much time and effort and does not bring financial stability so CSOs should focus on one viable source instead (Von Schnurbein and Fritz 2017, Vacekova and Soukupova 2015). Yet, in Slovakia the opposite seems to be the case. Several contributors highlighted the importance of diversification and becoming more entrepreneurial. The case study below offers one example of that outlook.

One CSO, which wishes to remain anonymous, originally started out as an informal group of local people, students, members of a theatre and various volunteers. They renovated a private building in the city centre and established a venue which has become a meeting place for different people and communities, as well as a place for creativity, personal development, social dialogue and civic activities. The main mission is to present and support the creation of contemporary art, mainly performance and musical genres, as well as educational and leisure activities for young people and the general public. As a cultural and community centre, the organisation offers a year-round programme of events for which they charge an admission fee. Currently, approximately 30 people are involved, directly and indirectly, including volunteers, members of the drama profession, production and technical teams, as well as those who run the bar-coffee shop.

One of those closely involved with the project argues that:

> "in principle, what our organisation has done is one great innovation that demonstrates how organisational capacity and sustainability can be built, even in those artistic and cultural settings which are outside the mainstream. By acquiring the grants for renovation and creating this centre, which also operates a bar, organises events and concerts we have secured sources of funding for our activities. Although it took longer than desired, we were able to strengthen our personnel as well. The solution is to diversify resources, to participate in projects, to obtain grants, but also look at self-financing options such as admission fees, or even business activities like the bar, which can generate money to go back into the organisation." (Interview SK1)

### Prioritise social inclusion

Several interviewees mentioned another common trend where CSOs work with beneficiaries to co-create activities and services (Nemec et al, 2015). One example of this is A-centrum, a CSO aimed at developing skills in working with vulnerable groups of children, young people and adults. For more than two decades they have implemented a range of projects on human rights for disabled people, education for social services facilities, children's homes, working with clients with various types of disability, and the prevention and management of problematic behaviour. They promote social equality, inclusion and integration of vulnerable groups through prevention, education, consultation and awareness-raising activities, stand for protection of human rights, democracy and multicultural dialogue. In their activities they try to introduce inclusion from the perspective of human rights and also provide an understanding that inclusion is aimed at supporting every member of society based on their current needs.

They currently implement a range of programmes aimed at young people. These initiatives are not only done for the target group, but in cooperation with the target group. They have implemented regional conferences and round tables to map the situation and needs of young people with disabilities, especially autism spectrum disorders and Asperger syndrome. The regional principle was important to make these activities accessible and approachable to local actors as well as to adapt the course of activities to the needs of young people with disabilities. A-centrum also organises educational and training activities aimed at the widest range of relevant actors including teachers, experts, officials and politicians so they can understand the real needs of these target groups. This is because these needs concern the disadvantages that are not visible and which can manifest themselves in behaviour that is being misjudged and perceived as misbehaviour when it is in fact a manifestation of the differences in each individual's neuropsychological development.

More at: https://www.a-centrum.net/

### Improving the image of civil society

It is vital to respond to the challenging political environment with initiatives which emphasise the importance and relevance of CSOs. One example of this is the "Not in our town" (NIOT) network which acts as a platform for people and organisations to promote and develop tolerance and human rights in the city of Banská Bystrica. The main goal of the platform is to respond to radicalisation, hatred and violence promoted by extremists and fascists. It consists of a range of actors working across civil society who organise activities such as campaigns, marches and protests.

They also support civil society leaders who have entered local politics and may be able to influence political and public opinion about CSOs. NIOT also supports having more political non-governmental organisations as a solution for improving the relationship between government and civil society. These are quite common in the USA, but that is not the case in Slovakia where activist and watchdog organisations are considered by some politicians

to be enemies. They are not seen as a way of holding politicians and institutions to account, thereby helping to protect citizens' rights and improve their lives. NIOT is trying to change these perceptions in order enhance the status and understanding of CSOs.

More at: http://niot.sk/

## Conclusions

CSOs in Slovakia are facing a range of challenges according to those interviewed for this study. The following conclusions emerge from interviews with CSO representatives and also a focus group:

- **Political environment** - the current difficult political climate may be influenced by elections in 2020. There appears to be a growing number of people working in civil society going into politics at all levels.
- **Legal environment** - while some laws have had a positive impact on CSOs others such as employment legislation may need to be changed to help with the recruitment and retention of staff.
- **Funding** - There is a persistent lack of resources over the long term. Instead, short term project finance is predominant leading to uncertainty for CSOs. One solution appears to be the diversification of resources and self-financing, including conducting business activities which can generate funds to run the organisation. Companies are increasingly aware of CSR but there needs to be better understanding of how to approach companies and communicate to them the vision of the CSO in order to enlist their support.
- **Image** - the image of civil society in the eyes of the public has become distorted. CSOs must now be able to defend themselves in front of the media, politicians and the public.
- **Organisational capacity** - there are insufficient resources to build the capacity of CSOs Furthermore there has only been limited professionalisation in the CSO sector. Young talent is being lost either overseas or to employers who can offer better prospects and job security.
- **Programme areas:**

  There is a growing need to defend human rights and democratic values and to create so-called political CSOs that will defend democracy.

  There is also a need for greater human rights advocacy, especially for people with specific needs. Furthermore, there should be enhanced capacity for social service providers given the challenges of demographic change such as ageing populations.

  Many CSOs are trying to target a younger demographic but young people seem to be more interested in so-called digital activism and informal initiatives such as community-based activities or SWAP events than traditional CSOs.

Both local and regional governments appear more inclined to listen to CSOs than in the past - at least in the east of the country. There is considerable potential for partnerships between the public sector and the CSOs. There is also a huge opportunity to develop cooperation with the private sector. Companies are aware of CSR, they want to give something back, "but they do not know how to grasp the idea and they need a professional CSO partner to offer a meaningful solution." (Interview SK10)



One focus group (FG) participant noted that:

> "over the past few years, the biggest opportunity for CSOs has been in partnerships with other actors in both the public and business sectors. In the public sector CSOs often become partners for strategy and public policy-making, and are increasingly able to formulate and offer their activities as services that the public sector is willing to pay for." (Focus Group SK7)

Several practitioners in the FG expected a rise in the number of social enterprises, they believe that social entrepreneurs might have a more significant impact on society and that hybrid models of businesses and CSOs will become increasingly common.

However, some of the FG participants, expressed negative views on the development of some CSOs:

> "there are organisations which belong to civil society, but the values they promote are not very democratic, quite the contrary. Perhaps we know what I am talking about and I do not need to name anyone...[9] No-one can stop them from forming an association if it is legal and abides by the law. There are also other organisations which are mainly mostly Christian and which are strongly opposed to LGBT rights." (Focus Group SK4)

However, overall, members of the FG felt that there had been a number of positive developments. These include:

- The growth of new informal initiatives based on shared interests and values, although sometimes enthusiasm can prevent more systematic work and planning.
- The emergence of a new generation of young activists.
- CSOs are now involved in a range of sectors from the prevention of extremism and support for democracy to activities for senior citizens and social entrepreneurship.

The challenges and positive developments outlined above are in line with the current development of CSO sector across Central and Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary and Poland, where CSOs are facing considerable criticism. In Slovakia the situation is not as bad although CSOs are mobilising to defend themselves and also improve cooperation with the government. The election of President Čaputová, has raised hopes of improved relations between the government and CSOs.

Organisational and financial challenges have existed for years. CSOs need extra funding to pay for, among other things, greater professionalisation and the training of both paid staff and volunteers. They must diversify their sources of funding to include the corporate sector.

The issue of "uncivil" society is an ongoing challenge and it remains to be seen how this issue will affect the future development of CSOs in Slovakia.

9 The participant referred to civic associations created or supported by far-right extremists.

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### List of interviews

Interview SK1: Local/regional CSO, culture, human rights
Interview SK2: Local/regional CSO, education
Interview SK3: National CSO, education, advocacy
Interview SK4: National CSO, employment
Interview SK5: Local/regional CSO, environment
Interview SK6: National CSO, social services and inclusion
Interview SK7: Local/regional initiative, human rights
Interview SK8: National CSO, social services and inclusion
Interview SK9: National CSO, social entrepreneurship
Interview SK10: National CSO, social services, social housing
Interview SK11: National CSO, education, inclusion
Interview SK12: Local/regional CSO, education
Interview SK13: Local/regional initiative, education, health
Interview SK14: Local/regional CSO, environment
Interview SK15: Local/regional CSO, sport

### List of focus group participants, 28 May 2019

SK1: Founder of a CSO, national organisation, social services and inclusion
SK2: Academic, university teacher and researcher
SK3: Statutory representative of a CSO, local/regional organisation, human rights and advocacy
SK4: Activist, volunteer, founder of a CSO, local/regional organisation, culture
SK5: Academic, statutory representative of a CSO, local/regional organisation, volunteering
SK6: Founder of a CSO, statutory representative, national organisation, social services and inclusion
SK7: Founder of a CSO, local/regional organisation, education and youth work

# Russia


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# Russia: New, vigorous forms of activism despite state restrictions[1]

By Nataliya Freik, Anna Yakovleva and Viacheslav Bakhmin

## Civil society overview

Civil society in Russia is not an integrated and homogeneous entity. With significant government penetration and influence present in all aspects of social life, there appear to be several different civil societies with different conditions and contexts of existence. There are "state-approved" registered non-profit organisations at one end of the scale, and at the other, there are grass-roots initiatives and mass protests. Sometimes these are spontaneous like the rallies against pension changes and sometimes they develop an organic organisational structure like the anti-rubbish protests against the construction of landfill sites because of their negative impact on the environment. There is not much that links the two ends of the scale, but they are both part of Russian civil society.

In the case of Russia we define CSOs as any organisations, whether formal or informal, that are not part of the apparatus of government, that do not distribute profits to their directors or operators, that are self-governing, and in which participation is a matter of free choice. Both member-serving and public-serving organisations are included. Embraced within this definition, therefore, are private, not-for-profit health providers, schools, social service agencies, professional associations, community-based organisations, sport and recreation organisations, cultural institutions, and many more.

Official data on registered CSOs (nonprofit organisations which have a legal status) is fragmented and inconsistent, despite the high volumes of information they ought to report to different agencies.

According to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), there were 216,900 non-profit organisations registered in April 2019.[2] However, no more than 149,000 could be categorised as CSOs. Entities such as trade unions, political and religious organisations, law firms and government institutions are excluded. Still, the remaining ones are not all CSOs. For example, the profiles of some educational institutions registered as non-profit organisations are barely distinguishable from similar organisations registered as commercial companies. It is also impossible to distinguish non-profit organisations established by the government from others.

Since 2010, another agency, Rosstat, has kept records of socially oriented non-profit organisations (SONPOs). However, since Rosstat does not work with a formal definition of what constitutes a SONPO, it is enough to mention in an organisation's statute that it carries out social activities for that organisation to be recognised. Taking that into account, in 2018 there were 140,247 SONPOs registered. This included 30,000 religious and trade union organisations, so it is likely that there are no more than 110,000 CSOs in Russia. These SONPOs include those established by the government.

1 This report was written in May 2019, based on interviews and a focus group conducted in April and May. This was before a series of events over the summer which significantly changed the social and political context of Russian civil society (see below for more details).

2 Ministry of Justice, <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOs.aspx> (accessed 24 April 2019).

A third of all SONPOs are registered in two metropolitan areas — Moscow / Moscow Oblast and Saint Petersburg / Leningrad Oblast. This is where the main resources and infrastructure are concentrated and where there are a high proportion of professional CSOs, operating at a federal level.

According to expert estimates and surveys, the number of SONPOs which exist only "on paper" or are not properly constituted entities is anywhere between 65 to 85% (Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation 2018). Taking all this into account it seems that there are anywhere between 20-40,000 continuously operating professional CSOs in Russia. In 2017–2019, 21,714 SONPOs competed for funding from the Presidential Grants Foundation, which is a key donor to Russian SONPOs.

This lack of reliable statistical data on the quantitative and qualitative structure of civil society makes it difficult to assess the exact nature of their resources.

The only thing that can be written with certainty is that the growth of government support for CSOs is a result of two factors. First, deliberate efforts to exclude foreign funding for the sector and second, the intention to reduce social expenditure by government by sharing responsibility with non-government players. The centralised "top-down" distribution of resources is typical for Russia. The highest budgets are allocated via federal institutions while the lower ones are at the local and municipal levels (Civic Chamber 2018). For example, in 2018, the Fund of Presidential Grants spent 7.8 billion roubles (€105 million) on SONPO projects. This is the only consistent available data on government support of SONPOs. In 2017, according to Rosstat, SONPOs received 97 billion roubles from government budgets of all levels, while figures from the Ministry of Economic Development suggest 40.8 billion roubles was allocated (Civic Chamber 2018).

Access to resources depends on the profile of individual CSOs. The government allocates significant funds to support the majority of CSOs which have been established by the state. It endorses and encourages charitable and other CSOs which act in a "constructive" way and provide "socially important" services. The situation is different for the small group of CSOs which often campaign on public interest issues such as human rights, the environment and corruption. These CSOs often come into conflict with the interests of government institutions or affiliated commercial companies.

Those CSOs which are deemed to be performing the functions of a "foreign agent", have the least access to government support. In 2018, foreign funding of all CSOs (3,900 in total) amounted to €1.1 billion, while that of "foreign agents" was only €10.2 million (Petrov 2019).[3] The last sum more truly reflects the amount of funds received by CSOs from foreign sources, as normally CSOs do not take the risk of raising foreign funds.

One of the sectors of civil society which is developing fastest is the area of charitable CSOs which now represent about 10% of SONPOs (or 11,000) in total (CF "Help Needed" 2019). Most of them are fundraising foundations which raise funds for children, religious purposes and the protection of animals.[4] Only a few human rights organisations have succeeded in raising mass donations such as "OVD-info".

The income of 524 fundraising foundations was at least 15.8 billion roubles or €240 million (Darmina 2018). Three foundations raised about one third of that sum and this was for the medical treatment of seriously ill children ("Podari Zhizn", "Rusfond" and "WorldVita"). A small number of Moscow-based foundations raise considerable funding while more than half of the foundations in 2017 raised less than 5 million roubles (€75,900) (Darmina 2018).

3 CSOs have to designate themselves "foreign agents" in all external communications if they engage in "political activity" and receive any foreign funding.

4 Charities which raise funds (from people, corporations, government, other foundations); the opposite are donor foundations which give donations.



Local community foundations are a particular type of CSO which raise funds to solve regional problems. Overall, there are about 70 such foundations in Russia, operating in 29 regions (CAF 2017) and the total amount of funds they raised annually is about €11 million.[5]

In recent years, there has been an increase in both the amounts and the number of citizens making donations. Recent estimates of the total global amount of annual mass donations to CSOs is 143 billion roubles or €1.9 billion (CAF 2016). In 2018 Russia only took 110th place out of 146 nations in the World Giving Index (CAF 2019a), and mass donations are about 0.4%–0.5% of GDP. Nonetheless, this is still comparable to government expenditure on certain areas of society (Shpak et al. 2018).

Commercial companies and wealthy businessmen fund social programmes, too. In 2018, the total budget of only 20 foundations, funded with the participation of people from the Forbes 200 list, was 8.3 billion roubles, or €112 million (*Pavlova 2019*). Meanwhile, 46 participants in the annual public contest *"Lidery Korporativnoy Blagotvoritelnosti"* (*"Leaders of Corporate Charity"*) provided at least 50.6 billion roubles or €770 million for CSOs (Donors Forum 2018).

Corporate and private foundations are a particular category of CSO established by wealthy individuals and corporations. These large donor funds dedicate significant budgets to territorial development and implementation of big social projects, as well as to infrastructural development in the nonprofit sector. In recent years, these kinds of foundations have refocused their activities towards the development and promotion of systemic infrastructure solutions or operating as think tanks. In 2017, the total budget of 80 donor foundations was 22.5 billion roubles (or €340 million).[6]

It is quite difficult to assess the activity of informal CSOs due to their dynamic nature.

- Less than one percent of adults claim to be members of informal associations such as hobby groups, communities of interest, social initiatives or groups concerned with the urban environment (Federal State Statistics Service 2018).
- Up to 11% of the population consider themselves to be volunteers, while at least one third of them volunteer in institutional structures like charitable funds or corporate volunteering.
- 22% of Moscow's residents are involved in informal groups, such as local communities engaged in environmental activities, helping vulnerable individuals, and the maintenance of apartment buildings (ZIRCON 2018). However, these data cannot be extrapolated across the entire country.
- Growing areas of civic engagement are virtual communities on the internet and social networks. Usually, they develop as a spontaneous response to local topics, although there are also more sustainable network groups of neighbourhood and urban communities.

5 Author's calculations, based on the public reports of the community foundations (2018).

6 Author's calculations, based on the public reports of the corporate and private foundations.

Signing online petitions is one popular way of expressing opinions and in 2018 alone, this was done by 36% of Russian citizens (CAF 2019a). The most popular online platform Change.org has 15 million users in Russia and, on average, one petition per day achieves a result (Kuresha 2018).

## Legal framework and political conditions

Russian legislation, regulating civil society, is extremely confusing and is subject to constant change.

The government attempts to protect citizens from what it perceives as destabilising external interference. This is explicitly linked to the activity of "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" which participate in events such as demonstrations. The main options for citizens wanting to assert their rights and to participate in public life are activities such as charitable work, volunteering, patriotic activities, civic chambers, festivals and forums.

The current legal framework encourages CSOs to assist the authorities in order to reduce federal expenditure or to attract more resources for pursuing projects which help the government. Those organisations and their leaders are involved in addressing large government objectives (such as building long-term and palliative care systems, search and rescue operations etc.). The government has outlined plans to strengthen support for volunteering and SONPOs (Khaziev 2018). These issues were mentioned in the President's May decrees and State Council meetings (State Council of Russia, 2018).[7] It is hoped that these initiatives will increase the number of citizens involved in volunteering by up to 20% by 2024.[8]

The situation is much less favourable for those CSOs involved with issues such as human rights, environmental protection, and corruption. The CSOs which face the most challenging environment are those on the official register of "organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent".[9] As of this year there were 75 such organisations.[10] "Foreign agents" have to report on their activities, expenditure of funds, and the personal composition of their governing body more often than other CSOs. They also have to indicate on all their official material that it is "distributed by an organisation performing the functions of a foreign agent". They are barred from participating in anti-corruption reviews of legislation and in getting involved in elections. Furthermore, they cannot be awarded the status of "providers of public benefit services". In 2018, 61 CSOs submitted a memorandum to the European Court of Human Rights, indicating that the law stigmatises Russian CSOs and that its true purpose is to suppress criticism of the government (Gzhel 2019).

In 2018-2019 the government enhanced its control over informal forms of self-organisation of citizens. For instance, in May 2019 it adopted a "sovereign" internet law which established government regulation of access to the Internet and introduced a law on insulting the government. In addition, amendments to the law have been developed which require

7 President Putin was inaugurated on 7 May 2012. On his first day as president, he issued 14 Presidential decrees, which are known as the "May Decrees". At his subsequent inauguration in President Putin issued more "May Decrees", mentioning support for volunteerism and so-called "socially oriented nonprofit organisations".

8 Presidential Decree No. 204, "Президент подписал Указ 'О национальных целях и стратегических задачах развития Российской Федерации на период до 2024 года'", 7 May 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57425> (accessed 24 April 2019).

9 The "Foreign Agent" law affects CSOs which get funds from abroad and are involved in political activity.

10 Ministry of Justice, <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx> (accessed 24 April 2019).



the mandatory registration of associations which do not have the status of a legal entity. If they are not in this register these CSOs are denied the rights of a public association, including having a name, conducting meetings, and distributing information on their activities.

The fundamentally different conditions and context of CSOs' activities contribute not only to economic stratification in the sector, but also to internal censorship and maximum disassociation from potential political issues.

At the same time, there is growing popular demand for transparent public discussion of important issues involving all those affected. Statistical data shows an increasing number of protest rallies, which rose by more than 50% to 2526 in 2018 from 1479 in 2017. The government usually attempts to block these demonstrations with a range of tactics from creating administrative obstacles to intimidation and even the direct use of force (CEPR 2018).

One significant event in 2018 was the announcement of plans to increase the retirement age. These were made public just after the presidential elections and at the beginning of the FIFA World Cup, when rallies and protests were banned. The proposals led to widespread protests involving hundreds of thousands of people and the changes were watered down.[11]

Since 2018, anti-rubbish riots have become a new but growing phenomenon in Russia. The most significant protests were caused by the decision to transport waste from homes in Moscow to the less populated areas of Russia such as the remote forested regions of Arkhangelsk and Komi.

In July 2019, thousands of mass protests began in Moscow after the authorities refused to register independent candidates for elections to the Moscow City Duma. These demonstrations became the largest political protests in Russia since the wave of civil unrest in 2011-2012. In response, the authorities carried out mass arrests of unregistered candidates and some protestors faced severe criminal charges (the so-called "Moscow case"). Civil society activists demonstrated solidarity, even those in various professions such as lawyers, priests and teachers. A number of media outlets, celebrities, bloggers, politicians, as well as the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights claimed that the criminal cases were fabricated and that there were no mass riots at any of the demonstrations.

## Challenges: Communication and partnership in the diversified sector

The most noticeable trend of 2018 was the **increased amount of civil and protest activity outside the registered CSO sector.**

One reason for this was the growing number of protests aimed at protecting the environment. According to one respondent:

> "people's critical needs were affected such as the land where they live and their health." (Interview R9)

11 A transition period was introduced, a measure for the protection of rights of the "pre-retired" people was proposed, and the retirement age for women was lowered.

There have been many conflicts like this before, but it was not until 2018 that they entered the "media landscape".

Experts linked the increase in civic activity to a new generation of activists. According to one interviewee:

> "a new generation of people, who want to do something, has developed. They organise via urban activity, common interaction, and association on the internet, which they use naturally." (Interview R7)

This trend is dramatically restructuring civil society. Two respondents noted the following:

> "combined, the registered CSOs today no longer adequately represent the diversity of all forms of civic activity." (Interview R9)

> "People unite in order to do something together and they do not really understand why they would need registered CSOs which sometimes lack clarity and have lots of requirements." (Interview R7)

An example of this was the Mothers March, when people organised themselves on Facebook and held a thousand-strong protest against the detention of two teenagers who were charged with organising an extremist association *"Novoe Velichie"* ("New Greatness"). As one respondent noted:

> "it was the age of the youngest members, that hooked me. Many of us have children of the same age. We saw that we couldn't protect our children and that this could happen to anyone. We realised that if we took to the streets to protest about the injustice of the court system, this wouldn't work. So instead, we came up with the idea of marching to the Supreme Court building with toys in our hands. This made it a performance and not a political act." (Interview R15)

Representatives of human rights organisations indicate that pressure and bullying by "community activists" has intensified (see also Public Verdict 2019; Russia Today 2019). As one respondent observed:

> "the police act in harmony with provocateurs from nationalist movements. They trigger conflicts, and the police do nothing about it." (Interview R5)

So far, both the government and registered CSOs have found it challenging to engage with local civic initiatives. One example of this was the clash with the local community over the failed plans of the well known charity "Nochlezhka" to open a laundry for homeless people in Moscow (Galkina 2018). The interchange of experience between professional CSOs and informal associations is limited. While the latter sound good and can attract public attention they often do not understand how to solve social problems.

The second strong trend is **the growing importance of the Presidential Grants Foundation** (PGF) as a key source of resources and a trendsetter for CSOs.



The presidential grants contest has become a model of transparency. Furthermore, there has been a new initiative involving the publication of reporting and the systemic collection of feedback on supported projects. All of this was welcomed by many of those interviewed for this study:

> "before the arrival of the new team at the PGF in 2017, money had been allocated without clear criteria. It was something contractual and not about competition. Despite this poor image, the young team there has managed to change the story. For the first year, CSOs didn't really believe it was an honest assessment and many of them refused to participate. However, after the first contest we could see that the rules had become transparent and it is now a story about trust." (Interview R14)

> "Prove that you are able to spend the money as intended, and you'll have the support." (Interview R1)

> "All applications are published openly. This provides insight into projects, organisations and ideas." (Interview R12)

> "This was really cool. Our ongoing activity is backed by funding from philanthropists, but we have no resources for any innovative projects. It is the grants that provide us the opportunity to develop." (Interview R13)

> "A fair amount of human rights organisations received funding during the last presidential grants contest." (Interview R5)

It is also important that obtaining a presidential grant means not only funding but also an enhanced status at regional and local levels which can help to gain resources and partners.

However, there was also a feeling among some interviewees that the PGF introduces risks to the sector, contributing to the erosion of independence. As several interviewees noted:

> "no matter how much they praise the PGF for the efficiency and transparency of its contest procedures…it does mean that independent CSOs are now tied to the President as an institution of power." (Interview R10)

> "The relative ease of obtaining funding and the amount of financial support available can create dependency. The project approach supported by PGF isn't everything that CSOs need, and it's counterproductive to make them reliant on projects. It increases the tendency to depend on circumstances and the grant conditions too." (Interview R9)

> "It makes CSOs adjust their business models to be compatible with the PGF and so they depart from seeking support in their community or in business. This means less sustainability for the sector." (Interview R6)

CSOs with the potential to raise funds from different sources are seeking to diversify revenues. As two respondents observed:

> "it is sick when all resources are centralised in Moscow in this way. It is better when everything it not focused on the PGF." (Interview R4)

> "The grant from the PGF is 30% of our annual budget. The rest comes from donations, and recently we launched a crowdfunding site. We don't want a big donor, we would rather have many different people supporting us." (Interview R13)

The third strong trend is **the growing importance of the internet and IT for CSO activity.** Two interviewees noted that:

> "social media plays a key role for everyone who collects private donations, for client organisations, for those who work with volunteers, or for those who want media attention and seek to promote specific issues." (Interview R6)

> "Human rights organisations are frequent users of social networks. For example, this was where they drew attention to, and opposed, the Yaroslavl case of torture in a correctional facility." (Interview R5)[12]

One of the key challenges for CSOs is growing government control of the internet. One interviewee noted that:

> "under the Yarovaya legislation the Federal Security Service has access to all data.[13] Meanwhile Roskomnadzor can block access to resources.[14] There is a law on insulting the government (Spring 2019). There is an unrealistic degree of control on citizens' activity. Yet much of the sector does not really know this and little has been made public." (Interview R8)

Given that the internet is the main means of communication for many CSOs, the key challenges are the development of informational competence and security.

Some actors have introduced initiatives to address these issues but they are mainly those who are considered part of the "Moscow-based CSO elite". Outside the capital one interviewee complained that:

12 See "Solutions: Solidarity, awareness and connectedness" for details.

13 The Yarovaya law refers to a pair of Russian federal bills (2016) which amended a pre-existing counterterrorism law and separate laws regulating additional counter-terror and public safety measures. It is known to the public under the family name of one of its creators—Irina Yarovaya. The amendments included an expansion of authority for law enforcement agencies, new requirements for data collection and mandatory decryption in the telecommunications industry, and increased regulation of evangelism, including a ban on the performance of "missionary activities" in non-religious settings. See for details: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarovaya_law> (accessed 24 November 2019).

14 For more on Roskomnadzor and blocking of websites and messengers see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Service_for_Supervision_of_Communications,_Information_Technology_and_Mass_Media> (accessed 24 November 2019).



> "many local CSOs have limited access to the internet and there are no people around who could teach them how to use information technologies." (Interview R7)

**The following trends** may have potential for growth.

**Diversification** remains a strong trend with a wide range of CSOs focused on different parts of the sector. As one interviewee put it:

> "different worlds, living according to different traditions, different in values and practices." (Interview R6)

According to several interviewees there has been a degree of polarisation among CSOs that otherwise share a specific area of interest, or theme:

> "(The) environmental protest movement is opposed to 'good cause' (environmental) activities (such as promoting an) environment friendly lifestyle or organising weekend community cleanups." (Interview R10)

> "There is human rights protection which is seen as kind of good, for example in the work of PNI (psychoneurological boarding houses). And there is defence in courts, freedom of assembly, and freedom from torture — and this is a human rights protection which is seen as kind of bad." (Interview R6)

> "There is recognition of some groups who face discrimination, like disabled people. There are also people who are over forty who face issues such as drug use and alcoholism and are not considered as experiencing discrimination." (Interview R2)

In many areas of CSO activity there are GONGOs.[15] These are pro-government CSOs, involved in promoting patriotism and the protection of "patriarchal values" or they are pseudo-CSOs, created for lobbying business or politics (Public Verdict Foundation 2019).

The influx of such players is largely boosted by the government's support of the sector and their convenience in terms of reporting, management, mobilisation of support etc.

According to some of those interviewed for this study, they have no impact on addressing specific issues. As one respondent noted:

> "they don't mess at all with the areas where the work has to be done, where real outcomes are required." (Interview R2)

However, they are draining scarce resources.

There are growing numbers of institutions who are imitating public engagement. These "mobs" occupy all the places during court or public hearings where decisions are made on disputed or high-profile cases. These organisations "accidentally" submit applications, before anyone else, to use areas where rallies are to be held, which might be inconvenient for the government. This means the opposition demonstrations cannot take place. They also register CSOs with the same names as existing ones in order to impede their work.

15 Government-Organised Non-Government Organisations.

2018 in Russia was **"The Year of the Volunteer"**. According to one respondent:

> "it has been a huge advertising campaign, incredible, lots of energy has been pumped in, and this campaign has gained strength." (Interview R1)

Hosting the FIFA World Cup, was a landmark, largely positive, moment for Russia and contributed to the promotion of events volunteerism. According to two interviewees:

> "Now at each big event there are trained volunteers, who like what they do." (Interview R14)

> "The government's interest in the subject of volunteerism has created a fashion, like a sort of career volunteerism, a desire to be in the crowd." (Interview R6)

There is a tension between events volunteerism (as a form of youth occupation) and social volunteerism (in social and healthcare institutions). As one interviewee observed:

> "the old volunteer CSOs look down on events volunteerism. They believe their real work is more important than events. And the young people see volunteers from the social area as the weird ones who do something boring, something they don't want to do." (Interview R11)

There is **a growing mass media interest in CSO issues**. Some media outlets and TV channels have helped CSOs to raise funds. These two interviewees argue that:

> "the political agenda has to be balanced, something positive should be said about people in the country. Mass social, charitable activity provides this sort of good news." (Interview R6)

> "The language is changing. CSOs are boring, but specific forms of participation, issues that many people are worried about, are covered in the media quite readily." (Interview R9)

**Charitable activity keeps coming out of the "grey zone"**. According to the World Giving Index, in 2018, 56% of Russian people spoke about their philanthropy, up from 42% in 2016 (CAF 2019a). The internet is essential and that is why this trend is more visible in the cities as the people from regions prefer to watch TV. As one interviewee observed:

> "people in regions need a TV, where no subject of support, charity or civil participation is promoted." (Interview R3)

The same interviewee mentioned that ordinary people hear CSOs and see them as experts:

> "there are more people from the civil community in government institutions and those who manage CSOs, are able to work with the government, to speak, and to think systemically." (Interview R3)

Finally, another trend is **the change in social makeup** (donors, volunteers, audience and staff) of CSOs, including informal civic associations. Two interviewees explained what this means in practice:



> "the old leaders, who created the organisations and drove them with their own credibility, are exhausted. They have reduced their involvement, and brought in successors. Younger members arrive, they have another vision, and right from the start they try not to "patch the holes" but to work systemically." (Interview R3)

> "Professionals such as lawyers, journalists, accountants, and marketing specialists are becoming more common. They are 35–40 years old and they have plenty of resources. They make activism movements strong and professional." (Interview R10)

The generational shift is also taking place outside CSOs. As this interviewee explained:

> "a new generation has entered working life. They use the internet freely, they know how to choose and subscribe to interesting resources, they are not afraid of bank card transfers etc. They are interesting both as supporters and donors. But they are going to build their own associations, based on their own outlook." (Interview R7)

## Solutions: Solidarity, awareness and connectedness

In response to the challenges outlined above, Russian CSOs have provided new opportunities for citizens to demand solutions to social problems. They have raised awareness, combined efforts and resources and increased solidarity. Below are some examples of this.

### Protests against a waste landfill in Arkhangelsk Region

In June 2018, near the settlement of Shiyes, some hunters noticed some ongoing deforestation and construction work. Activists from the group *"Chistaya Urdoma"* (*"Clean Urdoma"*) and municipal deputies approached the regional administration and requested an explanation of what was happening. Shortly afterwards, the regional administration acknowledged for the first time that a landfill was being constructed in that area.

The members of *"Chistaya Urdoma"* started to collect signatures against the construction of the landfill and to distribute materials explaining their position. For the whole of August residents of the nearby areas carried out small protests. Mass demonstrations started in October and people blocked the path of the construction machinery. Local deputies received more than 12,000 appeals demanding they forbid the transport of rubbish from other regions. In December 2018 approximately 25,000 people took part in widespread protests across the region. As one interviewee noted:

> "this was an unprecedented story. It went beyond pure environmentalism. It was a confrontation between Moscow and regions, which has always existed. But here, this expression of people's righteous indignation burst into open view. Why should someone gain at their expense?" (Interview R10)

Activists blocked construction, and there were occasional clashes with guards.[16] The case is still in progress.

### Crowdfunding of "shutdown fines"

Sometimes CSOs and the news media are subject to "economic sanctions". This is when they get exemplary unaffordable fines, which are often incommensurable with the grade of the violation. Then, crowdfunding becomes an efficient means of opposition, as well as a form of civil solidarity and expression of protest. As a spokesman of Transparency International Russia, Gleb Gavrish, explains:

> "we'll impose such a heavy fine that you will never be able to pay it, and you will have to shut down. That is, no one is shutting down an organisation by force, everything is according to the court order, but in the end, the organisation doesn't exist anymore." (Sarkisyan 2018)

During the summer of 2018, the editorial board and the editor-in-chief, Sofya Krapotkina, of the website "7x7" were fined (800,000 and 40,000 roubles, respectively) for so-called "drug propaganda". According to the court, the propaganda was in an interview for the website, where there were arguments about the dangers of synthetic drugs and heroin. The media outlet approached its readership, and it took a day to raise the amount of money needed to pay the fine (Sarkisyan 2018).

In the same way, in record time, Transparency International Russia (TIR) raised one million roubles (€13,500) to pay a court fine. Although ordinary people are not unusually interested in TIR's work on corruption it received its first wave of posts and likes due to the negative attitude of the plaintiff as well as the involvement of opinion leaders in social media campaigns (*Vorobyova 2019*). Representatives of the organisation stated that it was easier to raise a million roubles than to pay it. So far, no one has requested the money from TIR and the organisation has not been provided with the relevant bank account details in order to make payment.

### Media campaigns

The cases below illustrate the growing importance of social networks and mass media in the distribution of information on controversial issues.

In the summer of 2018, *Novaya Gazeta* published a video of the beating of a convict, Evgeny Makarov. The video was provided by the "Public Verdict" Foundation (Bobrova 2018a).

The video went viral causing public outcry. By the end of 2018 the video had received more than 3 million views on social media (*Bobrova 2018b*).

By the end of 2018 more than 150,000 people had signed a *Change.org* petition demanding an honest investigation and the punishment of those involved in this case.[17] The video led to

16 The demonstrations against the construction of a landfill in the Arkhangelsk region remain one of the main protests of 2019, gradually transforming from an environmental protest into a demonstration about maintaining civil dignity, and a search for a political solution.

17 See for details: 'Петиция о наказании начальства ярославской колонии за пытки собрала более 150 тыс. подписей', Interfax, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/627871> (accessed 24 November 2019).



a wide-ranging review. Seventeen employees were placed under investigation and the acting deputy director of the prison was arrested. Two interviewees saw this case as a positive one noting that:

> "all leading media stood jointly on the side of human rights protection." (Interview R5)

> "Nobody knew anything about the Committee for the Prevention of Torture. And the subject of torture itself seemed something abstract in the 21st century. Yet, suddenly, this video from the Yaroslavl colony [of the beating of Evgeny Makarov] was breaking records in terms of views on the internet. It turned out that torture was happening right on our doorstep and it's not a marginal issue anymore." (Interview R8)

In 2019 representatives of different mass media outlets and the blogging community stood jointly against the arrest and charging of the investigative journalist known as "Medusa", Ivan Golunov, on drug-related crime. Several dozen of Golunov's works about corruption among officials and businessmen in Russia were made public at the time of his arrest, and offered for reprint and distribution in order to raise public awareness. Three major Russian newspapers, Kommersant, Vedomosti and RBK, published a joint editorial under the headline, "I am / We are Ivan Golunov".[18]

### #Rublvden (#Рубльвдень, "A rouble a day"): it's a lot when there's a lot of us, https://nuzhnapomosh.ru/365/

#Rublvden ("A rouble a day") was the biggest fundraising campaign in modern Russian history. It was launched by the Charitable foundation "Help Needed" in December 2018. It calls for small recurring payments, beginning with as little as one rouble (€0.013) a day, for reputable charitable organisations. The campaign gained popularity very quickly. A total of 60,000 participants typically supporting several foundations at a time raised more than 9 million roubles.

### School of Regional Experts, http://expert.ngokitchen.ru/

Another example of CSOs working together for solutions to some of the challenges they face is the personal development programme known as "The School of Regional Experts". It was launched by the charitable fund, *"Dobry gorod Peterburg"* (*"The Good City of Petersburg"*), in partnership with the Centre for the Development of Nonprofit Organisations and the federation of *"Dobrye goroda"* (*"Good cities"*).

The programme is aimed at giving a boost to representatives of CSOs (except those from Moscow) who already have expertise in areas such as training, blogging, strategic consulting or publishing, and want to hone their skills so that they can become part of the expert community.

18 '3 Russian papers publish identical front pages in support for arrested journalist', The Moscow Times, 10 June 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/10/3-russian-papers-publish-identical-front-pages-in-support-of-arrested-journalist-a65936> (accessed 24 November 2019).

### NKO-profi (CSO-Profi), https://nko-profi.asi.org.ru/

Meanwhile, the NKO-profi project is intended to show that the nonprofit sector is not only an opportunity to change the world, but also an interesting opportunity for personal fulfilment and professional growth for people of virtually any occupation. As part of the programme, a series of interviews with the leaders of the nonprofit sector is published and meetings and traineeships are organised for students and young professionals who are looking to start a career in an area they feel is meaningful for them. All this helps people to learn more about CSOs activity and its leaders, as well as to remind existing CSO staff about the importance of their work. The organisers of this project are, the Agency of Social Information, the Potanin Foundation and the STADA Group in Russia.

### "Vse vmeste za razUMnuyu pomoshch" ("All Together for the REASONable assistance"), https://stop-obman.info/

One final example of local self-regulation and mobilisation in the CSO sector, is that of charitable organisations which have united against individuals or groups who abuse their credibility for private gain. The proponent was the non-profit charity, All Together, which consolidated the expertise of different regions, analysed the current legal framework and possible strategies against raising money on the streets, following concerns over scams, and computer fraud. The first step was the preparation of a declaration, in which the principles of work of the responsible foundations were formulated. So far, more than 290 CSOs have signed the declaration. The website of the association allows for the reporting of suspicious fundraising for charitable purposes. There are templates of documents for reporting incidents to the police and there are ongoing campaigns on how to distinguish real foundations from fraudulent ones.

## Conclusions

Civil society is relatively weak in Russia, most notably outside metropolitan areas.

Russian CSOs (especially registered ones) have been largely captured by the state and are mostly depoliticised. The Russian state's welfare policy favours outsourcing services to CSOs and encourages their ability to do so while at the same time seeking to police and limit the ability of civil society to critique what it is doing and encourage human rights.

Hence there is a big divide between state-approved SONPOs, funded through well-managed federal government funds, and CSOs that have emerged as vehicles for challenging government actions and protecting public interests.

The favourable conditions for volunteerism and charity have boosted the development of CSOs. There has also been a gradual professionalisation of the sector. As a consequence it is increasingly seen as an area for personal fulfilment and a means of social advancement in a society where such opportunities are relatively scarce. In turn, the increasing popularity of CSOs inevitably has attracted new players, including those, which consciously imitate CSOs or adhere to values and views that contradict the essence of civil society (the so-called "dark side" of civil society).

Civil society activism survives and is flourishing through non-traditional forms of organising and spontaneous actions that the state has so far found hard to control. The intensification of civil activity outside registered CSOs is one of the new trends, not mentioned previously in the EU-Russia State of Civil Society Annual Reports. Primarily, these include mass protests against the construction of facilities which undermine the ecosystem of an ordinary life such as anti-rubbish protests, those campaigning against pension reform or the refusal to register independent candidates for elections to the Moscow City Duma.

Given that in most cases the authorities do not take the demands of protesters into account, protests have tended to become more politicised. This has been marked by the growth of civic solidarity in response to the controversial behaviour of some members of the police and the security forces. Individuals and groups are advocating for justice and safeguarding dignity, in defence of political prisoners, especially iconic figures who are representatives of sustainable social groups such as journalists, students, actors, Christians, CSO activists and others.

The generational shift among the leaders and employees of CSOs, donors, beneficiaries and volunteers is frequently mentioned. At the same time, there are new challenges for the sector such as how to explain to a wide audience what is a "true" civil society, how to transfer experience and knowledge to beginners, and how to "do good". There is also a search for new approaches and strategies to pursue public objectives with the active involvement of business and new technologies.

It is hard to overestimate the growing importance of the internet and IT for civil society, especially taking into account the generational shift and the trend of an increasing number of unregistered, self-organising civil initiatives. The majority of the Russian responses to the current challenges lie here. One example of this has been the successful social media and crowdfunding campaign which has pushed back against new economic sanctions aimed at "foreign agents" and undesirable opinions.

There is more than one civil society in Russia and much of this is dependent on the nature of the relationship that each individual CSO has with the government. CSOs in Russia have different agendas, resources and contexts of existence. Each one has its own truth and view on how they can improve the life of Russian citizens.

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## List of interviews

Interview R1: Regional CSO, volunteering
Interview R2: National CSO, social service incl. healthcare
Interview R3: International CSO, humanitarian aid, social service incl. healthcare
Interview R4: Local CSO, territorial development, culture
Interview R5: National CSO, human rights protection
Interview R6: Cross-regional CSO, NGO resource center
Interview R7: National CSO, mass media
Interview R8: National CSO, civil society sector development
Interview R9: International CSO, research center
Interview R10: National CSO, environmentalism
Interview R11: Regional CSO, civil society sector development
Interview R12: National CSO, donor foundation
Interview R13: Local CSO, animal rights
Interview R14: Cross-regional CSO, social service incl. healthcare
Interview R15: Unregistered public initiative

## List of focus group participants, 6 June 2019

Senior manager, cross-regional organisation, donor community
Manager, national organisation, mass media
Senior manager, national organisation, donor community
National expert, human rights protection
Senior manager, infrastructural organisation

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# Annex 1: In-depth interviews questionnaire

Interview - PART 1 (for internal use by the researcher)

Closed questions:

1 Name of the organisation (not obligatory)

______________________________

2 In which field does your organisation primarily work?

☐ human rights and democracy, international aid
☐ environment
☐ social services, incl. healthcare
☐ youth, civic and vocational education
☐ history and culture
☐ sport and hobby clubs
☐ community development, NGO resource centres, think-tanks
☐ Social enterprise
☐ Social movements
☐ others

3 In what organisational and legal form does your organisation operate?

☐ registered non-governmental non-profit organisation
☐ Non-registered organisation – grassroots initiative (local)
☐ Non-registered organisation – big major social movement (regional / national / international level)
☐ other: ...

4 How long has your organisation been in existence?

☐ less than 1 year
☐ 1-10 years
☐ 11-20 years
☐ more than 20 years

5 How many people (full and part-time employees, volunteers and interns, members) are usually involved with your organisation?

☐ Less than 10 people
☐ 10-50 people
☐ 51-200 people
☐ More than 200 people

6 Budget of your organisation (in the last year):

☐ We work on a voluntary basis (no staff and salaries, only volunteers)
☐ Less than €1000 per year
☐ Less than €10,000 per year
☐ Less than €100,000 per year
☐ More than €100,000 per year
☐ I do not want to disclose this information

7 On which level does your organisation work mostly?

- ☐ On the local / regional level
- ☐ On the national level
- ☐ On the international level

8 How do you evaluate the context conditions for your organisation with regard to the following aspects?

| Context conditions with regard to: | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Legal framework | | | | |
| Political support by the state | | | | |
| Financing in general | | | | |
| State financial support | | | | |
| Private donations | | | | |
| Public opinion | | | | |
| Volunteering | | | | |
| Media coverage | | | | |
| Organisational capacity | | | | |
| Sectorial infrastructure | | | | |

9 Has the situation of your organisation became better or worse during the last 3 years?

- ☐ better
- ☐ worse
- ☐ stayed the same
- ☐ difficult to say

Interview - PART 2 (only for EU cases)

10a What are the **main challenges your organisation has faced** in the last 12 months? Are these challenges new or have they existed for some time? Have these challenges changed the way your organisation operates (e.g. themes, activities or organisational structure)?

10b Are these challenges similar or different to those facing other organisations that you work with?

10c Do you think these are challenges which face all civil society organisations in *country*?

11a Are you aware of any interesting innovations or solutions which have been initiated by civil society in order to overcome these negative trends?

11b Has your organisation developed any solutions which you think might be replicated by others? Can you provide any written descriptions of these practices which could be shared with others?

12 Do you think there are any broadly positive developments for civil society at the moment? What do you think will be the new opportunities in the future?

13 What is your organisation's experience of **international cooperation (e.g. CSOs, international bodies, donors, solidarity movements)**? Would you describe it as positive or negative? Do you think there has been any change in international cooperation in the last 12 months?

14 Would you be interested in participating in a focus group to explore the policy implications of the research findings in May 2019?

15 May we publish your interview anonymously through open data storage, so that it can be used by other researchers?

(Researcher may elaborate on topics of his/her own choice for each particular interview)

# Annex 2:
# Focus group questions

While the focus groups will adopt a broadly open approach the following questions should be used to guide the discussions:

1. Do you agree that the main challenges and trends in your country are those indicated in the research conclusions?

2. What can the CSO sector in your country share as a learned lesson with the (international) community?

3. Given the identified challenges, what social/political conditions would enable CSOs to overcome these challenges?

4. What public messages should be sent by the CSOs in regards to the current challenges and situation of CSOs / civil society?

NOTES

## NOTES

# Impressum

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It is easy to generalise about civil society but much harder to provide an accurate assessment based on evidence. How many organisations are there in this field? Which societal issues are they dealing with? Has pressure from the state been increasing or decreasing? The authors of this report have considered these, and other difficult questions and offer a clear outline of some of the challenges facing civil society organisations and also their responses.

Alexander Arkhangelsky, writer, professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow

This EU-Russia CSF report on civil society is highly appreciated. Vibrant CSOs and a well-developed civic culture are the basis of an innovative and inclusive society. With democracy in crisis, it is important to develop a range of strategies to push back against restrictions. Also, solidarity with Russian CSOs makes us stronger and offers hope that nobody will be left behind, even those facing difficult circumstances. We are in need of systematic, transparent funding opportunities to help defend democratic values and capacity building in civil society.

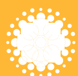
Mall Hellam, executive director, Open Estonia Foundation, Tallinn

**Your feedback and contributions**

Your comments and proposals are very welcome, especially on further themes and countries which might be included in future reports. Send your feedback and ideas to research@eu-russia-csf.org

**Other CSF publications**

We also invite you to look at our previous reports: "State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia" (2016, 2017, and 2018). See our website: www.eu-russia-csf.org



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