



2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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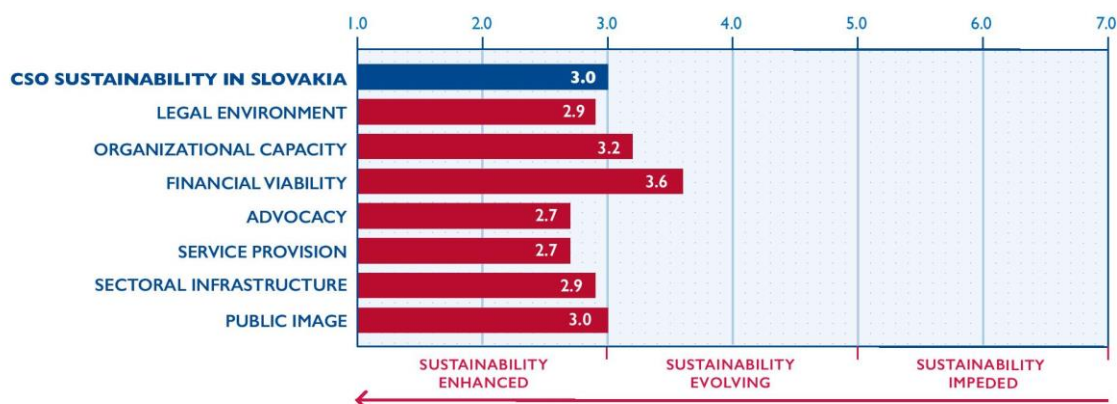
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OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.0



Significant events in Slovakia in 2020 included parliamentary elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and sweeping arrests by the National Criminal Agency (NAKA).

Parliamentary elections took place on February 29, 2020. Transparency International Slovakia monitored the financial aspects of the electoral campaign, leading them to lodge a complaint against the then-governing party Smer-SD for exceeding the election expenditure limit. The Ministry of Interior found the party's argument that the limit was not exceeded to be sufficient, without any further monitoring or investigation. The election turnout was 65.78 percent, the highest since 2002. The anti-corruption movement Ordinary People (OĽaNO) won the most seats. Political parties that failed to reach the threshold to be represented in parliament obtained 28 percent of the votes, the highest rate in the history of democratic elections in Slovakia. President Zuzana Čaputová gave the leader of OĽaNO, Igor Matovič, a mandate to constitute the government. Matovič subsequently formed a government with Sloboda a solidarita (SAS), Sme Rodina, and Za ľudí.

In its government program statement (GPS), the government declared its support for human rights, active citizenship, and the development of civil society and indicated that supporting organizations active in a variety of areas in society was one of its goals. The government also declared its interest in cooperating with the civil sector and claimed to respect the principles of open government.

The first state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was declared on March 16 and lasted until June 14. Strict rules at the beginning of the pandemic, including a ban on the assembly of people living outside a single household, resulted in low infection rates and helped to control the situation during the spring and summer. When measures were eased in the summer, however, infection rates rose. A second state of emergency was put in force on October 1 and lasted through the end of 2020. Despite this, hospitals neared capacity around Christmas. The public was dissatisfied with the government's management of the crisis, causing approval rates of the governing party to drop from 25 percent to 10 percent during the year.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, CSOs actively helped to tackle the health crisis. In addition to providing protective and medical equipment to hospitals and social service homes, they also provided assistance to vulnerable groups forgotten by the government, countered COVID-related disinformation, and organized volunteers.

Another defining feature of 2020 was a massive wave of arrests by NAKA focused mainly on corruption and economic and violent crimes. During the year, NAKA arrested or accused more than fifty influential public figures, lawyers, police commanders, judges, and businessmen.

In this context, overall CSO sustainability deteriorated slightly in 2020, with negative developments recorded in four dimensions: organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, and service provision. These changes were driven mainly by the effects of the pandemic. No notable changes were observed in the other dimensions of CSO sustainability.

According to the most recent information available from the Ministry of Interior, there were 59,844 active CSOs in Slovakia as of December 31, 2020, including 56,905 civic associations, 510 non-investment funds, 1,778 nonprofit organizations providing public benefit services, 120 entities with an international element, and 531 foundations.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 2.9



The legal environment governing CSOs remained largely unchanged in 2020 and continues to be largely enabling.

There were no changes to the legal regulations governing CSOs' registration, operation, or dissolution in 2020. Organizations can register as civic associations, non-investment funds, nonprofit organizations providing public benefit services, or foundations. Each legal form has its own registration process which is fairly simple and can be completed quickly. Because of the extraordinary measures adopted to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Interior announced that it would not hold CSOs administratively and legally accountable if they did not submit their annual reports to the Register of Financial Statements by July 15, 2020.

The long-anticipated Act No. 346/2018 on the Register of Non-Governmental Non-profit Organizations, which entered into force in 2019, lays the groundwork for establishing a single up-to-date public register of all nonprofit non-governmental organizations (NGOs). By requiring organizations to provide more information to the registry in order to be eligible for public funding, the register is expected to increase transparency in the sector. However, the registry's launch was postponed to January 1, 2021.

CSOs were required to activate an electronic mailbox by June 1, 2020. Failure to do so could result in organizations failing to get their mail and missing legal deadlines for delivered documents. More than 43,000 of the 78,000 entities, including CSOs, as well as churches, political parties, and interest associations, that were supposed to activate their electronic mailboxes by this deadline had not yet provided information about their statutes, which was a requirement for the mailbox to become active.

CSOs and their representatives are free to operate in accordance with the laws. The government may dissolve or restrict CSOs only for specific reasons stated in the law. CSOs may openly express criticism and take part in public protests. CSOs have the same legal rights as other entities to challenge government decisions. The lockdowns and curfews imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in restrictions to the rights to assemble and protest.

As in 2019, representatives of several political parties, including ĽSNS, Vlast', and Smer-SD, attacked CSOs during the electoral campaign and expressed their support for legal regulations to designate CSOs receiving foreign funds as "foreign agents." The prime minister also made many derogatory comments about CSOs and activists, including especially offensive slurs about Roma activists. However, such sentiments were not reflected in the new government's policies.

Natural persons and businesses supporting CSOs still do not receive tax benefits. However, the Income Tax Act allows them to assign between 0.5 and 2 percent of their owed taxes to eligible CSOs. In the summer, efforts to amend parts of the Tax Law addressing tax assignments took place without broad engagement of members in government advisory bodies or civil society stakeholders. The proposal would have added the option for legal persons to provide non-financial contributions alongside their tax assignments up to 2 percent. In the end, the proposal was withdrawn.

In May, after cooperation with the Nonprofit Sector Coordination Crisis Unit—an advisory unit formed of representatives of the Chamber of Non-Profit Organizations, grant foundations, and key organizations involved in crisis assistance, as well as lawyers and economists focused on the nonprofit sector—the Ministry of Finance adopted a legal regulation that allowed CSOs to obtain funding from the 2 percent tax assignments earlier in the

year than they had been able to before. In addition, the deadline for using the assignments was extended by twelve months. The regulation also expands the possible uses of funds received from tax assignments, allowing recipients of these funds, regardless of the focus of their activities, to use the funds to help mitigate the negative consequences of a pandemic. In addition, the process of becoming an eligible recipient of 2 percent assignments was simplified; the needed confirmation now can be obtained from notaries rather than Social Insurance Offices. However, this service is provided on a fee basis.

Some CSOs are able to obtain income through fees and service provision as long as they reinvest the income into their operations or activities. CSOs can engage in public collections freely and accept foreign funding. On November 4, 2020, the National Council of the Slovak Republic (Slovakia's parliament) adopted an amendment to the Public Collections Act prolonging the reporting deadlines.

The Pro Bono Attorneys Program administered by Pontis Foundation continues to provide CSOs throughout the country with legal services. CSOs can also find legal information on the website of the First Slovak Nonprofit Service Center (I. SNSC).

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.2

CSOs' organizational capacity worsened slightly in 2020. CSOs' operations were restricted by the measures adopted to control the pandemic. As a result, many CSOs had to reduce their staff and change or cancel their activities.

There continues to be a wide gap in organizational capacities among CSOs throughout the country. Strong and well-established organizations, organizations in bigger towns, and professionalized organizations with stable staff generally have stronger organizational capacities than small CSOs, those based in the countryside, and organizations that rely on volunteers. These capacity gaps increased in 2020.

Organizations actively seek to build relations with stakeholders in society, including potential supporters and volunteers. However, these efforts were significantly affected by the pandemic, which forced CSOs to change their activities, priorities, and methods. While some CSOs effectively adapted their services to reach more people, others had the opposite experience. Organizations that offer social services and cultural and sports activities were particularly affected. CSOs also had fewer opportunities to network and find supporters, as in-person activities were banned.

The majority of CSOs have clearly defined goals and visions, although these changed during the year to reflect the new situation. Most organizations still lack long-term strategic plans. Strategic planning became more difficult during the year due to the uncertain and rapidly changing circumstances.

CSOs had access to a variety of resources supporting resilience and fostering constituency building in 2020. For example, the Active Citizen Fund (ACF), supported by the European Economic Area, offers CSOs organizational and capacity-building support, rather than just project-based funds.

Management structures vary from organization to organization. Some CSOs have boards of directors to formally meet legal requirements, while executive managers actually make all decisions. Others actively engage their members in activities, fundraising, and strategic decision making. The legal regulations do not require CSOs to have written policies, procedures, or guidelines, although donors sometimes require them. Mainly larger and well-established CSOs have codes of conduct and commit to transparency in their procedures.

CSOs' long-term staffing capacities were affected by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic in 2020. Many projects that required in-person meetings were stopped or significantly limited; this resulted in funding being put on hold and forced several organizations to further reduce expenses by dismissing staff or delaying hiring. In



addition, brain drain from the CSO sector continued during the year, as many people transitioned to political positions after the parliamentary elections. With the exception of employees of CSOs providing social services, most CSO employees still work on a freelance rather than a contractual basis. Working for the CSO sector is still considered most suitable for young people without children due to the lack of income stability and inadequate remuneration. CSOs still struggle to obtain resources for staff training and development.

Volunteering efforts were robust in 2020. Pontis Foundation managed to organize its annual Our City event helping ninety-seven CSOs, centers, schools, and kindergartens. However, due to the difficulties caused by the pandemic and the requirements to follow hygiene standards, only 3,500 company volunteers participated in the 2020 event, compared to 10,000 in 2019. The use of the expression “volunteer” also increased throughout the year as municipalities engaged so-called volunteers, who were actually paid, to conduct COVID-19 testing, increasing confusion as to what volunteering actually is.

Some organizations increased their use of information technologies as they carried out more activities online in 2020. This transition to online work enabled some CSOs to engage more participants. Other CSOs had insufficient skills, equipment, or staff capacities to transition to fully digital operations. The majority of CSOs own out-of-date equipment and employees do not have sufficient training opportunities to enable them to use software to its full potential. CSOs continue to lack appropriate cybersecurity measures.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 3.6



CSO financial viability deteriorated moderately in 2020, primarily because of the economic impacts of the pandemic. As a result, many organizations found their ongoing existence to be threatened at the same time as they were playing a vital role helping society.

CSOs continued to work towards diversifying their resources in 2020, including by actively engaging in fundraising. At the same time, many CSOs are worried that they will receive less funding from donations and tax assignments as many taxpayers lost their jobs and companies had less income, although this will only be clear in 2021. Well-established and experienced organizations were even more dependent on EU funds in 2020, although these funds often drive CSOs to shift from their original missions as they are administered

globally and do not always take into account local or regional particularities.

Foreign funding proved itself to be very important during the crisis, providing many organizations with needed resources and proving to be more flexible than state granting schemes. ACF continued to provide CSOs with a reliable stream of funding with relatively low administrative burden. ACF aims to foster civil society, support active citizenship, and strengthen vulnerable groups in Slovakia. ACF primarily supports advocacy projects, including those focused on topical issues such as human rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) rights, and women’s reproductive rights. In its second call for proposals, ACF awarded EUR 3.1 million to eighty-two organizations for projects that began implementation in July. Thirty-five projects that each received EUR 30,000 through the Open Society Foundation (OSF) Stronger Roots for Civil Society initiative started implementing activities in January 2020. The program strives to increase the organizational and sectoral resilience of CSOs and embed them in the societies in which they operate. Through a separate call titled Stronger Ties of Civil Society Networks, OSF allocated EUR 50,000 to two organizations. Recognizing that the pandemic complicated many activities, ACF and Stronger Roots enabled CSOs to adjust their budgets and indicators and extended deadlines. Financial schemes under the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Labor were not as flexible.

CSOs were initially excluded from government funding schemes focused on the COVID-19 crisis. In August, however, the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization launched a call for proposals to support CSOs’ activities to mitigate the impacts of the crisis with a budget of EUR 1.1 million. The call was carried

out according to the Regional Development Support Act and therefore only some CSOs, namely foundations and civic associations, were eligible for funding. In addition, the minimal level of support, EUR 10,000, was still too high for small regional CSOs. Therefore, this program ultimately only provided support to a limited number of CSOs.

CSOs faced increasing problems with state funding after the new government took office in 2020. In particular, there were problems in the allocation of subsidies in the field of gender equality by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family. First, the ministry presented an amendment to the Act on Subsidies Supporting Gender Equality in conjunction with another unrelated act and only made it available for comments for seven days, despite the fact that it had not consulted previously with relevant stakeholders. The act was renamed the Act on Subsidies Supporting Equality of Men and Women and was significantly abridged. Subsidies were subsequently not allocated to organizations with expertise in gender equality, but instead went to three of the most visible organizations fighting against women's reproductive rights and gender equality. There was also evidence of conflicts of interest in the distribution of funding. One of the grantees – Fórum života – was co-founded by a member of parliament from the OĽaNO movement, while another member of this organization is an employee of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family. Another one of the grantees – Poradňa Alexis – is actually a project of Fórum života. In October, the Ministry of Culture passed an amendment to the Act on Subsidies that gives priority to individuals in the creative industry who lack income due to the pandemic; CSOs are only eligible for the subsidies after that.

There was a lot of confusion related to the deadlines for the 2 percent income tax assignments in 2020. Days before the deadline for submitting tax returns, a measure was adopted that extended the deadline until "the end of the pandemic"; however, the measure failed to indicate whether the deadline for making tax assignments was also extended. This issue was only clarified in April, after the original deadlines had passed. As described above, CSOs had the opportunity to use assigned funds to combat the COVID-19 crisis, and not just for the public service for which they were initially registered. Postponing the tax returns reduced the income of many CSOs. According to data from the Financial Administration, tax assignments in 2020 reached EUR 53 million, a decrease of EUR 20 million compared to 2019.

Individual donations grew in 2020. During the year, the crowdfunding platform ĽudiaĽud'om raised EUR 2.8 million, an increase of 67 percent in comparison with 2019. However, crowdfunding has only been successful for specific projects and does not provide CSOs with support for operational costs or strategic topics. As a result of the pandemic, CSOs were not able to organize in-person public collections in 2020, affecting several large CSOs. Although many CSOs initiated online activities to raise funds, these efforts were insufficient to make up for the decrease in funding collected through in-person collections.

Corporate philanthropy decreased in 2020 as businesses shifted their priorities and focused more on either increasing their savings or supporting activities related to the pandemic. Less donor support for topics such as human rights, education, culture, arts, and access to justice decreased the financial stability of organizations working in these areas.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the country is thought to have contracted by 10 percent in 2020, which will have a negative impact on tax assignments as well as donations from natural and legal persons from the private sector in the coming year. According to the Nonprofit Sector Coordination Crisis Unit, based on the experience during the 2009-10 economic crisis, the CSO sector's income is expected to drop by EUR 70 to 80 million in 2021, with an expected decrease of EUR 34 million from natural and legal persons' tax assignments and about EUR 22 million in donations from natural and legal persons. The rest represents decreases in income from CSOs' own activities.

Little information is available about CSOs' efforts to generate income, although there are efforts to develop sustainable social enterprises. The majority of registered social businesses are focused on integrating or employing disadvantaged and vulnerable people into the labor market. There are also examples of sheltered workshops that have successfully transformed and registered as social enterprises.

Well-established and larger CSOs have their own financial management systems that tend to be more transparent than those used by smaller organizations. Foundations, nonprofit organizations providing public benefit services, and non-investment funds are required to submit annual reports to the government. Ministries have the right to audit the use of funds received through tax assignments or other public resources.

ADVOCACY: 2.7

CSO advocacy worsened moderately in 2020. Although the newly elected government is not in ideological conflict with the sector (except for the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, which has expressed its opposition to gender equality and women's reproductive rights), it has not established closer relations with CSOs than the previous government. Due to the pandemic, many CSO activities were less visible in comparison to previous years.

To some extent, the structure of the new government should have fostered dialogue between the government and CSOs and improved the procedures of engaging CSOs in the formulation of public policies. In reality, however, the situation was often different. While the GPS reflected many CSO priorities, including in the fields of security, corruption, and environmental protection, it also questioned the importance of some already existing platforms, such as the Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality (GCHR). GCHR only met once in 2020 and the activities of several of its committees were paralyzed for a number of reasons, including measures related to COVID-19 as well as poor management. Topics such as gender equality, abortion, and LGBTI rights became highly politicized as conservative political entities had increased representation in the parliament.

The engagement of CSOs in the formulation of public policies was unsystematic and in many cases was more declaratory without providing CSOs with a real opportunity to affect the form of proposed measures. The authorities did not perceive CSO sector stakeholders and official government advisory institutions such as the Government Council for CSOs and Chamber of Non-profit Organizations as partners, and therefore excluded them from many important debates, including those focused on changes to the tax law, formulation of a recovery and resilience plan, and pandemic solutions in marginalized communities. When CSOs were engaged in the preparation of important and strategic materials, it was on more of an ad hoc basis.

In 2020, the Government Council for CSOs continued to meet online, however, many of its committees, including the Committee for Preventing and Eliminating Racism and the Committee for Children and Youth, did not operate. In response to the pandemic and its impact on the CSO sector, the Nonprofit Sector Coordination Crisis Unit was established within the Chamber of Non-profit Organizations by the Government Council for CSOs. Among its primary objectives were identification of key impacts of the crisis on the CSO sector, mapping of organizations' needs, and cooperation between the state and civil society.

Representatives of the Nonprofit Sector Coordination Crisis Unit met with the prime minister to stress the importance of CSO activities in helping vulnerable groups during the pandemic and highlight the difficulties the sector is facing. They also led debates about measures important for CSOs' operations in the short and long runs. Unit representatives also met the deputy prime minister for investments and informatization and presented a proposal to serve as a base for discussions between state representatives and the CSO sector about how to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on CSOs. These discussions are expected to continue in 2021.

CSOs worked with the government's Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development, an advisory body that promotes active citizen participation, to complete a CSO sector mapping exercise in 2020. At the beginning of the pandemic, this effort quickly identified core challenges to the sector and the Plenipotentiary started to work on them actively. These efforts led, for example, to changes in the possible use of 2 percent tax assignments and deadlines for spending these funds. The Plenipotentiary also submitted proposals to the Ministry of Finance to compensate for the pandemic's impact on CSOs.

Few protests were organized during the year because of pandemic-related restrictions. In addition, CSOs found that there was less public support for some of their issues, such as environmental concerns and reproductive rights, as people were focused on their own survival in the face of the pandemic.



Despite these obstacles, CSOs initiated many advocacy campaigns in 2020.

The citizens' initiative Heart at Home created an app that enabled 47,000 citizens to request ballots easily, allowing them to vote by mail. Heart at Home also advocated to political parties to broaden voting by mail for all elections.

Many green citizens' initiatives were established during the year. The Climate Needs You initiative launched a petition that was signed by 120,000 citizens, making it the biggest online petition in Slovak history. The initiative asked the National Council to declare a state of climate emergency and commit the government to adopting legislation, state schemes, and policies to reach carbon neutrality by 2040. It also demanded the National Council to support climate plans adopted by the EU. In December, the parliamentary Committee for the Environment decided that the petition would be discussed in the National Council in March 2021. Several climate protests were also organized. Greenpeace Slovakia, in cooperation with other organizations and activists, blocked the Government Office and ministries in October and organized a protest in front of the Government Office lasting sixty-five hours in December. The goal of these initiatives was to get the state to support ambitious climate goals at the European Council meeting. Activists, scientists, artists, musicians, well-known personalities, influencers, environmental protection organizations, and many other movements participated in this protest. Despite these efforts, the Slovak government did not support these goals at the European Council meeting.

The platform Voice of CSOs, which was established before the parliamentary elections to defend the civil sector, analyzed legislative proposals during the last phase of the electoral period and evaluated political parties' election programs and attitudes towards civil society. In November, the initiative submitted five demands related to the recovery and resilience plan to the government and asked the government to ensure public engagement in finishing the plan. In order to make this process sufficiently transparent, it also demanded CSOs' engagement in the implementation of proposed measures. In December, the platform's representatives met with the minister of finance to discuss the process of preparing the plan. Although the Minister of Finance said at the meeting that "further cooperation will be not only in the development and completion of the recovery plan, but in particular in its implementation," a draft of the plan was sent to the European Commission right before Christmas without any public engagement.

Women's rights and feminist organizations Možnosť voľby and ASPEKT, as well as the initiative Povstanie, led the campaign Nebuďme Ticho to oppose proposed legislation focused on limiting women's reproductive rights. A march was organized in July, while a protest planned for September was canceled because of the worsening situation with the pandemic. Instead, a collection of wooden cooking spoons with messages was transported to the parliament building.

SERVICE PROVISION: 2.7



CSO service provision deteriorated slightly in 2020, as CSOs' ability to provide services was limited by the pandemic and budget cuts. Some organizations adjusted their activities in response to the situation and moved them online, while others reduced their operations. Organizations providing social services found it particularly difficult to carry out their activities.

CSOs provide services in many areas, particularly social services. The state still does not fully use CSOs' potential in service provision. For example, CSO-run centers and shelters offering services to victims of domestic violence were crowded throughout the year. In addition, the state funding system gives preference to public social service providers over private ones. The government completely left CSOs out of the process of responding to the

COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, despite the role CSOs could have played in mitigating the impact of the pandemic. For example, despite increased demand as a result of the pandemic, the government failed to support helplines, such as Linka dôvery or Linka detskej istoty, during 2020, which had already been forced to reduce their activities in 2019.

In general, CSOs react to community needs as well as donor priorities and continue to fill in the gaps in services provided by the state. Demand for CSOs' services changed throughout the pandemic. Many CSOs were actively engaged in activities related to the pandemic, including activating and organizing volunteers for testing centers, distributing personal protective equipment, helping the most vulnerable groups (including elderly people or marginalized Roma communities), and providing psychological counselling and interventions for abused women and children. Civic initiatives, such as Who will Help Slovakia (Kto pomôže Slovensku), provided medical and protective equipment to hospitals, social service homes, and other facilities serving vulnerable groups. These activities were all implemented without government support. CSOs also provided critical services to Roma communities, including the distribution of face masks and SIM cards so children could participate in distance learning. While the national government has nearly completely forgotten these vulnerable groups, municipalities such as Bratislava Municipality were also active in this area.

To the extent possible, CSOs moved their activities online and continued issuing publications, organizing workshops, and publishing analyses for other organizations, academia, businesses, religious institutions, and public authorities. CSOs generally provide their services without discrimination.

CSOs' services are usually financed through grants, although some CSOs cover their costs by charging fees for the services they provide. Certain services, such as care services for the elderly, should be partly financed by municipalities, but obtaining such funding is very time-consuming and often impossible to obtain and therefore, CSOs often offer these services for free with funding from other donors.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 2.9

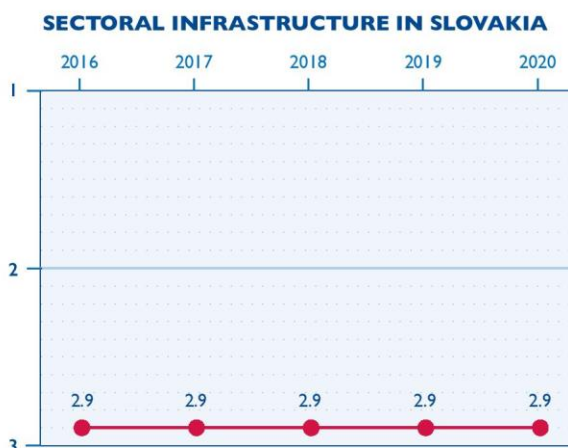
The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector did not change in 2020. Unlike other countries in the region, Slovakia does not have dedicated intermediary support organizations or CSO resource centers. As a result, CSOs continue to have limited access to relevant information, technology, training, and technical assistance.

Similar to the situation in the previous year, CSOs mainly form coalitions to address current topics or carry out grant-funded projects. These coalitions often fall apart due to the lack of stable human and financial resources or when projects end. As the highest umbrella authority, the Government Council for CSOs connects several sectoral groups and platforms with the government. Its non-governmental part—the Chamber of Non-Profit Organizations—effectively coordinates positions among CSOs and their promotion.

In 2020, several coalitions, platforms, and partnerships defended CSOs' interests or focused on topics such as development aid and global education, despite a shortage of human and financial resources. As discussed above, the Nonprofit Sector Coordination Crisis Unit was established during the first wave of the pandemic and operated essentially without a break the rest of the year. Other successful examples include the platforms Who will Help Slovakia and Science Helps (Veda pomáha). The platform Voice of CSOs united fifty-one member organizations and continued its activities to foster democracy and solidarity in Europe in 2020. The informal platform CS Defense continues to share information to defend the sector mainly through its Facebook page.

Eight community foundations continue to raise funds from local donors, which are then used to provide assistance to people and CSOs. Several foundations such as Pontis Foundation and Center for Philanthropy provide CSOs with grants using funds obtained through tax assignments.

CSOs have access to a sufficient array of educational activities and training covering most of their needs, including time management, public speaking, accounting, fundraising, and the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Because of the pandemic, most training was offered online in 2020. Experts at several organizations, including Pontis Foundation, Voices, Slovak Fundraising Center, and getADVANTAGE, offer training to CSOs on a

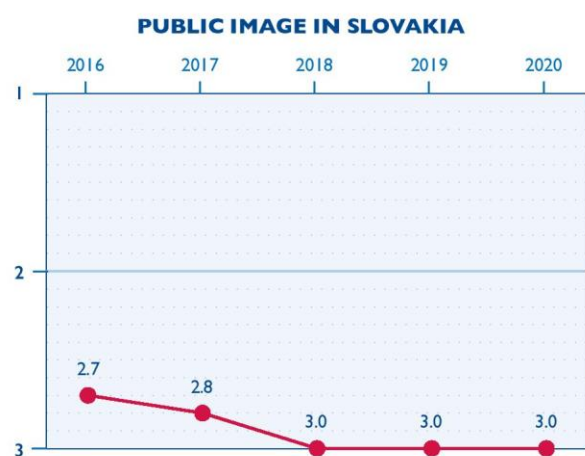


pro bono basis. Maxman Consultants organizes pro bono as well as paid training, while Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia (PDCS) charges for its educational activities. In the east of Slovakia, there is still a lack of expert training for the sector, therefore CSOs in this part of the country sometimes form ad hoc partnerships with the business sector to meet their training needs.

CSOs continue to build partnerships with stakeholders from other sectors. The degree of partnership and cooperation with the authorities depends largely on the topic and existing contacts with the new administration. Partnerships with the business sector did not change in 2020. CSOs maintain positive relationships with businesses, some of which go beyond financial support to include the transfer of know-how and capacity building. For example, the Carpathian Foundation received support from T-Systems Slovakia as it explored the feasibility of incorporating agile management principles into its work. The Investigative Center of Ján Kuciak and Investigative Journalism Fund cooperate closely with the media and investigative journalists.

CSO representatives, sociologists, political scientists, analysts, and experts in several fields, together with the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development, issued a paper in late 2020 titled *Analysis of Socioeconomic Contribution of the Nonprofit Sector and State and Trends of Development of Civil Society*. The paper presents the current state of civil society development in Slovakia and identifies its trends. The data gathered for the paper and the results of the research will also serve as part of the basis for the new Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia for 2021 – 2030.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.0



The CSO sector's public image did not change notably in 2020. Campaigns prepared and carried out by the civil sector, including Who will Help Slovakia and Science Helps, successfully mobilized the public and business sector and helped to improve the sector's reputation, as they presented CSOs as being highly agile and ready to help. In the second wave of the pandemic, however, misinformation, smear campaigns, and hoaxes about the virus spread mainly through social networks even faster than this positive news.

Due to the pandemic, CSOs were not the central targets of attacks in 2020. However, rhetoric accusing several CSO activists who entered politics of having foreign contacts and promoting an anti-Slovak agenda continued. These accusations were broadly distributed by

misinformation media, activists, and politicians. At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, there were also efforts to accuse CSOs (mainly organizations focused on human rights and security matters or watchdog organizations) of passivity during the pandemic. Moreover, efforts continued to divide the CSO sector into so-called "good CSOs" (addressing charity, ecology, and social matters) and "bad CSOs" (addressing human rights issues).

The change in government resulted in moderately more favorable rhetoric among the highest political representatives. However, negative rhetoric by high government representatives, including very imprudent and undiplomatic remarks by the prime minister, continued. Several political parties, including ĽSNS, Vlast', Smer-SD, and SME Rodina, engaged in efforts to smear advocacy, watchdog, and other CSO activists in 2020. The leader of ĽSNS, Marian Kotleba, has repeatedly smeared "political" CSOs, including by accusing them of being "pernicious international anti-Christian organizations"; CSO representatives responded in an open letter. The prime minister insulted three Roma activists and expressed suspicions that the sector supports the political opposition. On the other hand, the President of the Slovak Republic expressed her support of CSOs in her June 2020 Report on the State of the Republic.

"Uncivil society"—organizations that are formally CSOs but have goals that contradict the fundamental values that form the basis of the vast majority of CSOs, including rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms, and the defense of the interests of vulnerable groups—continued to be a phenomenon in Slovakia. For example, civic association Our Homeland is the Future (Naša vlast' je budúcnosť) hosts several groups, including Slovak Recruits

(Slovenskí Branci, a paramilitary group), civic organization Slavica (a tool of Russian hybrid influence in Slovakia), and Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské hnutie obrody). These organizations actively engage in public relations to gain public support for their work; at the same time, they use a wide range of strategies to undermine public trust in other CSOs, especially those that are involved in the promotion of human rights and liberal and democratic values.

Despite the enormous efforts of CSOs and civic initiatives to deal with the challenges of the pandemic, these activities still received limited media coverage in the standard broadcast media (TV and radio). Every week during the pandemic, however, Voice of CSOs chose and publicized the activities of five CSOs helping society through its newsletters, social media accounts, and website.

Within the above-mentioned analysis, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development conducted a poll that suggested that trust in civic initiatives outweighs distrust. This was especially true among younger people with higher levels of education, who consider their household situation as financially sound, can speak several languages, and have positive experiences living abroad. A significant majority of respondents agreed that civic initiatives and CSOs belong to democratic society (81 percent), address citizens needs where the state is behind (74 percent), and that the majority of CSOs and civic initiatives are beneficial for Slovaks (72 percent). A majority (76 percent) agreed with the statement that citizens who want to influence problem solving should be active in civic initiatives and CSOs. Over half (56 percent) of respondents thought that the majority of CSOs manage their funds transparently, while more than two-fifths took a critical point of view (31 percent) or did not respond to the question (13 percent). Two-fifths (44 percent) also agreed that “the majority of CSOs promotes goals of foreign donors and serves foreign interests,” while 43 percent disagreed with this statement. More than half (57 percent) agreed that CSOs should not meddle in politics, as this is the role of political parties. The poll further indicates that in order to foster citizens’ trust towards CSOs, it is crucial to highlight CSOs’ contributions in addressing the population’s needs, rebut unfounded statements about their subordination to foreign interests or other non-Slovak stakeholders, and increase transparency, particularly when it comes to funding.

As in previous years, large and well-established CSOs publish annual reports as part of their transparency efforts. CSOs generally lack codes of ethics, although some larger and well-established organizations have them. Limited transparency, mainly in smaller organizations, and the existence of “pseudo-organizations” wanting to benefit from tax assignments continue to represent serious difficulties.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

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