

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN the Republic of North Macedonia 2020-2021

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA 2020-2021

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Findings presented in this report are based on primary data collected under a two-phased survey research conducted within the project “CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations” as part of planned activities and pursuant to data collection methodology aimed to advance the status of civil society organizations involved in sector working groups. In particular, the survey’s goal is to measure perceptions about civic forms of organization and participation in policy-making processes.



# DETAILED SURVEY FINDINGS

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## About the project

The project “CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations” aims to facilitate meaningful and structured participation of the civil society that expresses citizens’ views to impact key sector-wide reforms under the EU accession process. It is implemented by the Foundation Open Society Macedonia, in partnership with the Center for Civil Communications, Eurothink – Center for European Strategies and Reactor – Research in Action.

Through the project “CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations”, civil society organizations are able to receive timely and precise information about topics, areas and issues of importance for citizens and the civil society, in order to impact key sector-wide reforms under the EU accession process. For more information, visit the website: [www.dijalogkoneu.mk](http://www.dijalogkoneu.mk).

## About the survey research

The above-named project anticipates organization of several research surveys to measure civic engagement and participation in various societal processes and to establish actual state-of-affairs in the civil society. This document presents findings from two surveys conducted in the period August - October 2021, aimed at measuring attitudes and behaviours of citizens and civil society organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia and establishing actual state-of-affairs in respect to advocacy for citizens’ interests and civil society participation in policy- and decision-making processes, with the ultimate goal of identifying barriers and providing guidance on new opportunities for more efficient advocacy and participation by citizens and the civil society. In addition, this report includes an overview of key data from the baseline survey conducted in 2020 in order to allow conclusions on trends related to civic engagement. More details on both surveys are available under relevant chapters on the methodology approach below.





## 2. CONTEXT AND STATE-OF-PLAY

The second round of surveys was conducted in a year marked by significant processes in the country that could impact data on citizens' views on some parameters researched. As was the case with the 2020 survey, in 2021 the country entered another election cycle, this time at local government level. The election campaign officially started on 27 September 2021,<sup>1</sup> while data collection pursued by telephone interviews with citizens took place one month before the election campaign, whereby survey responses could have been affected by the election, especially those related to participation in relevant processes at local level. This is also valid for the survey among civil society organizations that took place during the election campaign, which is not advisable for any type of research study on social-political or economic-social topics. However, having in mind the overall project duration, both surveys were organized under those specific circumstances and there was no room for postponement.

Moreover, in that period, the country was still facing serious challenges in respect to its aspiration to join the European Union, primarily due to blockade by the Republic of Bulgaria concerning the EU Council's conclusion on setting the date for the first intergovernmental conference between the Republic of North Macedonia and the European Union, which would have marked the start of the country's accession negotiations. Hence, the project team acknowledges that this extended blockade could have impacted responses to questions inquiring about citizens' views on EU-related matters and the country's perspectives in the future.

The health crisis caused by COVID-19 continued well into 2021, although restrictions for certain forms of civic engagement that had been in place during 2020 were no longer in effect. Nevertheless, the epidemiological situation in the country, the pandemic's consequences on the lives of citizens, the institutions and the economy could have also affected actual participation by citizens and their responses on civic engagement in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> "Official Start of the Campaign for Local Elections", Radio Free Europe in Macedonian language, published on 27.09.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Hb8T2i>

## Possible comparisons with previous research studies

Vast portion of data collected under this research survey confirms the trends observed and measured in the past when similar studies were conducted on this topic in the period 2012-2016<sup>2</sup>, including the 2020 surveys organized under this project.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, direct comparisons with results from previous research studies are impossible because measured attitudes and behaviours are closely linked to developments in the society and to methods of interaction and communication with the community, which had been visibly changed under the current context, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying health protection measures and restricted movement mandates. For example, although the parliamentary elections were held in 2020, they cannot be equitably correlated to the level and the type of civic engagement measured or established in the period 2012-2016 due to the different nature of pre-election campaigns, but also due to generally limited interaction and movement of citizens. The same is valid for 2021 survey results, when the country entered another election cycle at local government level, which took place in the context of extended effects by the pandemic on the entire society.

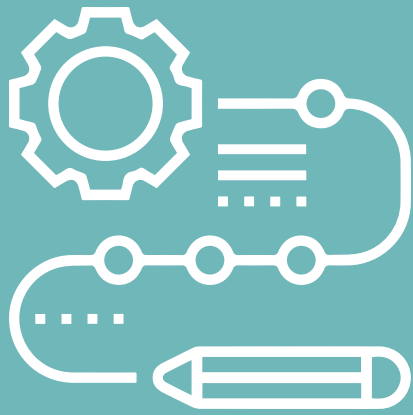
More specifically, this report provides direct comparisons of trends with 2020 survey findings, primarily in respect to civic engagement values and citizens' views and attitudes about the European Union. In that, it provides an overview of key issues related to types of civic engagement, but also citizens' views about the European Union, and views and experiences of civil society organizations.



<sup>2</sup> More information on results from both surveys is available on the following link: [http://graganskoucestvo.mk/graganskoucestvo\\_old/index.html](http://graganskoucestvo.mk/graganskoucestvo_old/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> More information on results from 2020 research survey on civil engagement is available on the following link: <https://bit.ly/3ljZwi0>





# 3. METHODOLOGY APPROACH

The research survey involved two separate phases covering two relevant target groups: general population in the Republic of North Macedonia and civil society organizations registered in the country, and used a combined quantitative research method:

- computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) with citizens;
- computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI) with civil society organizations, i.e. online questionnaires for individual completion, programmed with the LimeSurvey tool and made accessible to targeted respondents, i.e. representatives of civil society organizations, by means of link sent via e-mail.

## Research methods

Data collection relied on two separate quantitative surveys with two target groups of interest:

### 1 Telephone interviews with citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia – dual frame survey sample (landline and cell phone)

Attitudes of the general population in the Republic of North Macedonia were measured by means of quantitative survey that included telephone interviews (CATI) with citizens aged 16+ years, according to the principle of random sample selection. The ratio of landline versus cell phone interviews is 20/80. In the case of the landline sample, interviews were conducted with adult household member who had the most recent birthday before the survey date (principle of random selection = first/last birthday) while in the case of the cell phone sample, interviews were conducted with persons responding to the call made to randomly selected numbers, upon confirmation of their age (16+ years) and ability to participate in the survey by answering the questionnaire.

The general population survey was conducted in the period 5 to 20 August 2021.

- Target population: citizens aged 16+ years;
- Sample: representative at national level, 1300 respondents, stratified according to gender, ethnicity, age group and regional distribution (statistical regions in the country), based on the most recent population estimates/ the last population census.

## **2 Online survey with civil society organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia – unassisted completion of electronic questionnaire by directly targeted civil society organizations**

Computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI) with civil society organizations, i.e. unassisted completion of online questionnaires programmed with the LimeSurvey tool. The survey questionnaire was distributed through the LimeSurvey service that enables detailed overview of invitations to complete the survey, verification whether questionnaires were opened, and monitoring the status of responses and replied invitations. This survey questionnaire was comprised of 76 questions grouped into 5 sections.

Data collection from civil society organizations took place from 15 September to 15 October 2021 and was marked by low response rate on the part of civil society organizations. This could be a result of reasons elaborated in the section on the context under which the research survey was conducted in 2021, as well as increased work volume among civil society organizations after the COVID-19 protection measures were lifted. As shown by research data, this survey observed higher shares of responses in respect to creation of policy proposals and actions that are further advocated before the state institutions, which implies active engagement on the part of civil society actors and limited time for additional inputs, in addition to those made as part of policy-making, decision-making and advocacy processes. Moreover, the period when this survey was conducted overlapped with a high number of surveys by other organizations, which could have created fatigue among civil society respondents to provide feedback, especially against a background of no improvements in their relevant sectors or insufficiently clear and tangible improvements.

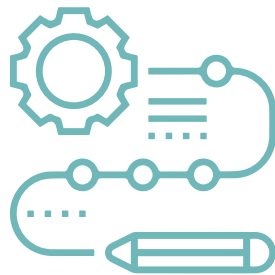
- ➔ Target group: representatives of civil society organizations, including chambers of commerce and trade unions, with the status of active entities registered on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia;
- ➔ Sample: questionnaire was completed by total of 67 civil society organizations, of which 9 opened the link to the online questionnaire, while 58 of them responded to the closed-type questionnaire directly linked to their e-mail address.

## **Sample framework and socio-demographic characteristics**

The general population sample covered under this survey is representative at national level, i.e. for the Republic of North Macedonia, and included 1300 respondents aged 16+ years. Definition of the sample framework took into consideration relevant parameters that ensure representatives distribution, as follows:

- statistical region;
- place of residence (urban/rural);
- age group;
- gender;
- ethnicity.

The civil society sample covers 67 entities that successfully completed the online questionnaire. Initially, the questionnaire was sent to 2111 civil society organizations, but was completed only by 67 civil society representatives. The list of civil society organizations was composed by the research team and project interns, and included consultations with all relevant and existing civil society databases. Having in mind that the research team was unable to review and verify all 2111 e-mail addresses, additional copy of this questionnaire was uploaded on the web-platform [dijalogkoneu.mk](http://dijalogkoneu.mk) and was shared on the Facebook page hosted by the project [EU Dialogue](#), and the Facebook pages of the [Foundation Open Society - Macedonia](#) and [Reactor – Research in Action](#). More details on the type of civil society organizations are available in the appendix to this report focused on the civil society survey.





## 4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – GENERAL POPULATION

As elaborated before, civic engagement is a crucial component of any healthy democratic society. Engaged citizenship, i.e. citizens who are actively involved in improving their communities and their country are a huge benefit to the civil society and the main indicator of healthy communities, a democratic state and satisfied citizenry.<sup>4</sup>

This set of questions aims to define the context in which the surveyed population takes or does not take action within their communities, or more specifically, it aims to measure citizens' sense of belonging to their closer or broader community, which is expected to be in close correlation to the level of care for and engagement within their community.<sup>5</sup> In that, civic engagement is analysed in terms of three different aspects: (1) participation in civic initiatives for the common good, i.e. organization of citizens around actions that improve their communities; (2) practice of civic engagement as effort to address problems in the society, by contacting authorities or by participating in public debates, working groups, civil protests, petitions, submissions and proposals; and (3) conventional civic engagement, i.e. voting at parliamentary, local and presidential elections.

### **Status of civic engagement: initiatives, activism and conventional civic participation**

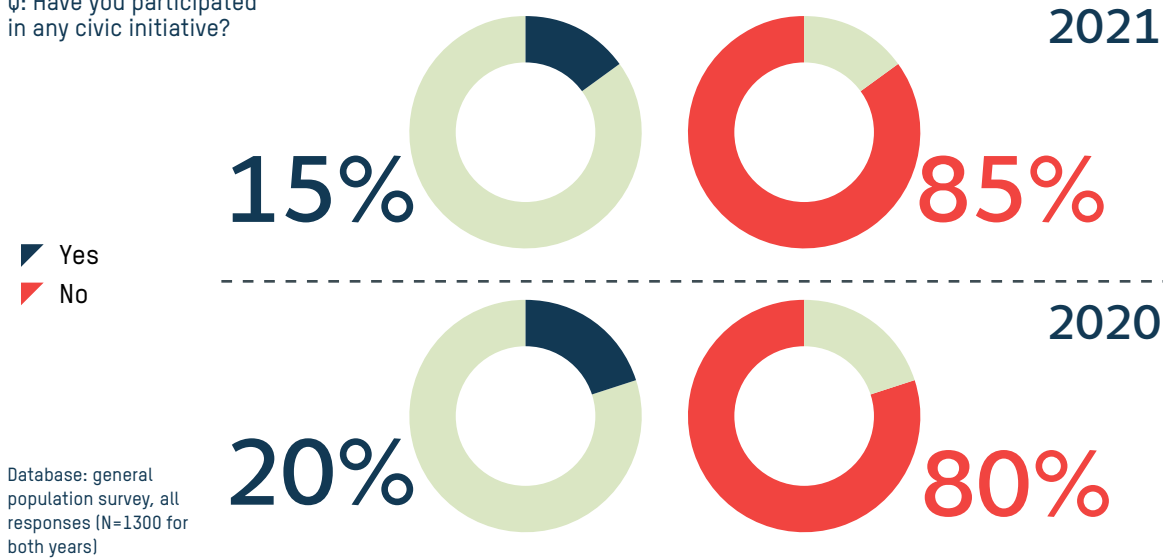
As regards participation of citizens in civic initiatives, the share of affirmative responses under the 2021 survey is marked by additional decrease. Namely, only 15% (2020=20%) of respondents have participated in organized initiative to improve their place of residence or their country of residence (Republic of North Macedonia). Although the difference in responses obtained in both survey years is not large, one possible reason for the decreased share of answers is linked to the COVID-19 crisis, having in mind that the initial question on civic engagement under the 2020 survey covered the period January 2019 to January 2020, i.e. before the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, it is important to note that, under both surveys, more men than women have indicated participation in such initiatives, accounting for difference of 10% in relevant responses for this type of civic engagement (Chart 1). Another important

4 Zaff, J., Boyd, M., Li, Y., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2010). Active and engaged citizenship: Multigroup and longitudinal factorial analysis of an integrated construct of civic engagement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(7), 736–750. Available at: <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9541-6>

5 Ibid.

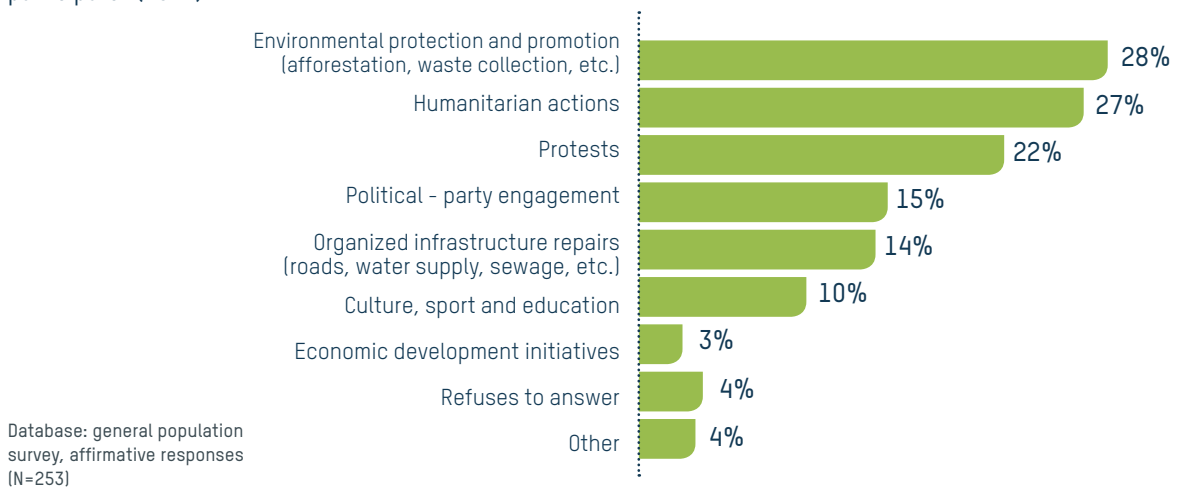
observation concerns the continuation of the trend noted in 2020 whereby **respondents with lower formal education background demonstrate significantly lower participation** in this type of civic engagement. There are no significant differences in responses according to other demographic characteristics.

**Chart 1.**  
Q: Have you participated in any civic initiative?

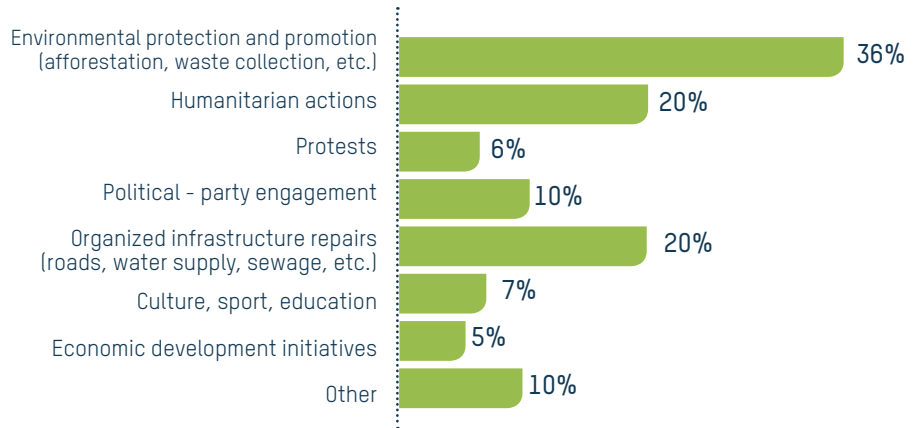


As was the case in 2020, the highest share of citizens who participated in civic initiatives have joined actions for environmental protection and promotion. On the other hand, there is a notable **decline of 16% in respect to activities related to participation in protests** and, again, it should be said that under the 2020 survey citizens reported on their activities before the COVID-19 crisis. Hence, it could be concluded that participation in this type of initiatives is decreased as a direct result of the pandemic (Chart 2)

**Chart 2.**  
Q: In what type of civic initiative did you participate? (2021)



Q: In what type of civil initiative did you participate? (2020)

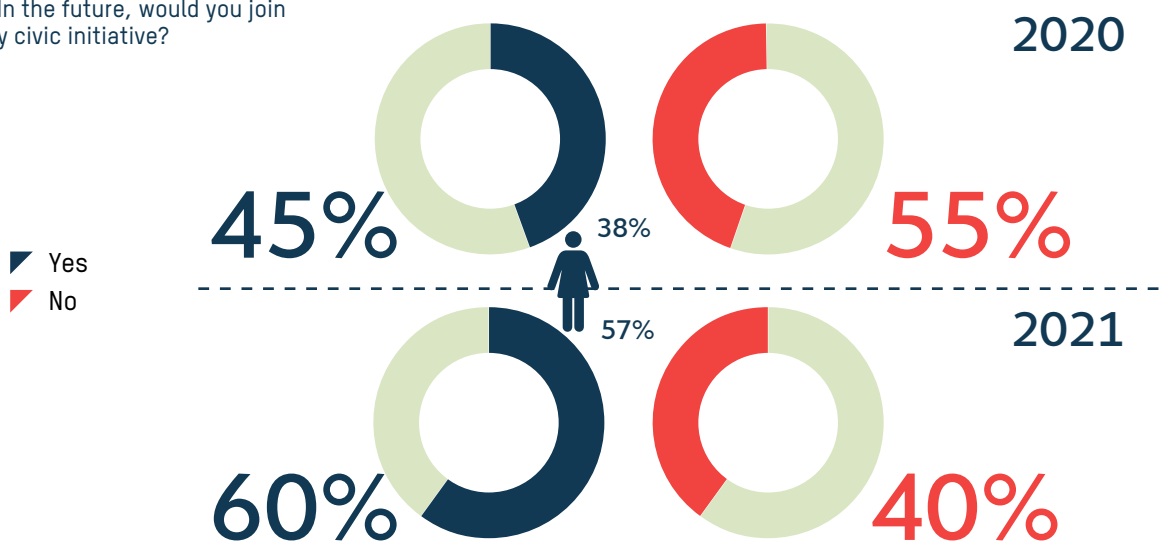


**Most frequently indicated reasons for low civic engagement**, i.e. low participation of citizens are the same as those reported in the previous survey:

- 1 Citizens claim they are not familiar with opportunities for participation in this type of initiatives;
- 2 Citizens lack interest and/or time to join civic initiatives;
- 3 Citizens do not believe their participation in such initiatives would make a significant difference in resolution of problems (*conclusion inferred from survey results*).

Despite low utilization of these forms for civic engagement, survey results show an increase in respect to possibilities for future involvement of citizens in such initiatives. In particular, the share of citizens who would join civic initiatives in the future is increased from 45% in 2020 to 60% in 2021. An additional observations is the **narrowed gender gap** in respect to possible engagement in the future, whereby **the number of women indicating they would join some civic initiative in the future is increased under the 2021 survey** (women: 2020=38%; 2021=57%) (Chart 3).

**Chart 3.** Q: In the future, would you join any civic initiative?





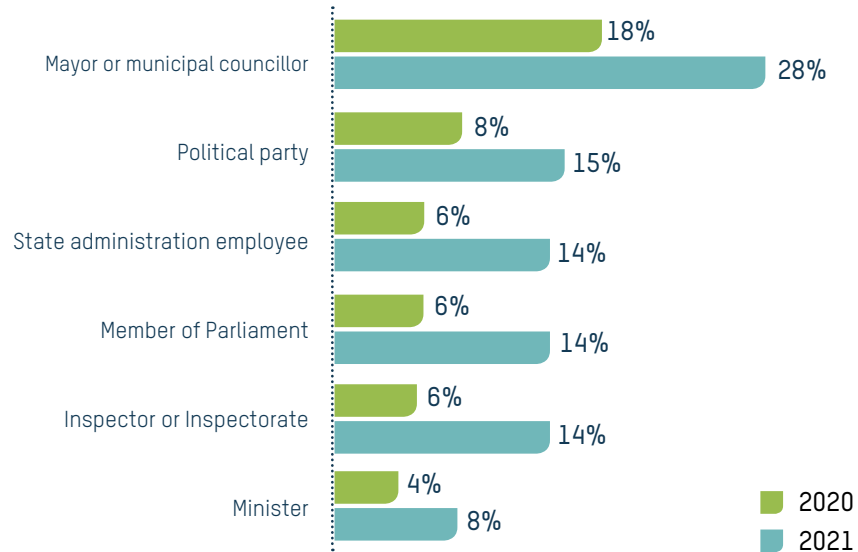
The age group of respondents has some impact in this respect, i.e. respondents from the age group of 60+ years are significantly unlikely to join this type of civic engagement. In addition, respondents' education level also plays a role in their preparedness to join any civic initiative, whereby citizens with higher level of formal education are more inclined to join civic initiatives in the future. Ethnicity does not affect preparedness of citizens for this type of civic engagement in the future.

## Contact activism and other types of civic engagement

Significant increase is noted in respect to contact activism as a form of civic engagement in the period between the two surveys. One possible explanation for that could be the fact that data collection in 2021 took place immediately before the start of local elections, i.e. during the political campaign for the local elections that were held in October 2021. In that, there is notable frequency of answers related to contacting representatives of state institutions, with most contacts reported with mayors and municipal councillors (2020=18%; 2021=28%). However, while the shares of responses indicating this type of contact activism are increased, survey data show relatively low utilization of existing participation mechanism that allow citizens to directly contact their representatives in state institutions, especially at national level (Chart 4).

Chart 4.

Q: Did you contact any of below enlisted institutions or persons in order to solve particular societal problem as individual, unrelated to your job?



Database: general population survey, all responses (N = 1300)

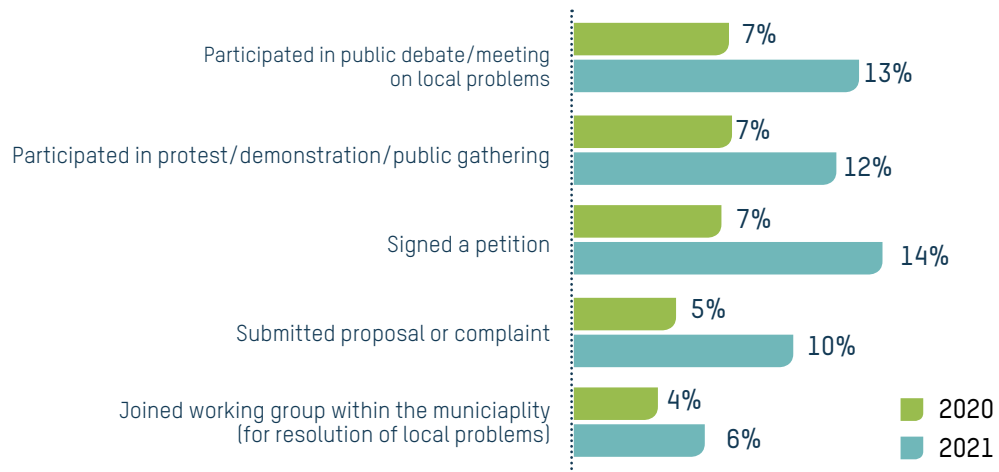
Detailed analysis of data shows repetition of trends under the 2020 surveys, i.e. citizens indicated they most often contact mayors or municipal councils. Although the difference in answers is not large, as was noted under the previous research studies, again citizens are likely to contact political parties then their elected representatives, i.e. MPs, to have a particular societal problem solved. It could be said that mayors are perceived as political party's person who manages the local government, holding great power to "have the matter solved", i.e. to solve citizens' problems. As regards socio-demographic data, it could be noted that **higher education level** implies greater likelihood for utilization of this mechanism for civic engagement. On the other hand, **young people aged 16 to 29 years** are by 10% less likely to

use this method for civic engagement, which is indicative of the fact that youth either lack adequate social contacts to use this mechanism or do not apply this approach for resolution of problems they are facing (reasons behind this observation are not additionally researched, but it is assumed they are of social character and related to generational differences in establishing communication or due to lack of adequate encouragement for civic engagement).

In addition to direct contacts, survey data show a **mild increase in responses indicating participation of citizens in different forms of contact activism**. Although this increase holds no significance, it is interesting to note that only small shares of citizens have participated in public debates, have attended public gatherings, have signed petitions, have used possibilities to lodge complaint or proposal to institutions, or have joined working groups. The trend of low participation in or use of such mechanisms is indicative of **the need for greater involvement of citizens** and complete use of institutional mechanism for civic participation, especially having in mind the high share of citizens who would like to impact decisions at both local and national level (Chart 5).

**Chart 5.**

**Q: Have you...?**



Database. general population survey, all responses (N=1300)

## Conventional civic engagement

The most used mechanism for civic participation remains conventional civic engagement and there are no notable and significant changes in responses obtained under both surveys. More than 70% of citizens reported they have turned out at polling stations on all or almost all elections. Moreover, it should be noted that while this share remains high under both surveys (2020 and 2021), it is not reflected in official figures on the voter turnout. Notably, voter turnout at the 2020 parliamentary elections accounted for 52%, and it accounted for 49.23% in the first round of the 2021 local elections.<sup>6</sup> One possible reason for that could be seen in non-updated voter registries, but that should be additionally verified by further analysis and data collected during the 2021 population and household census.

<sup>6</sup> For both election years, data were taken from the official website of the State Election Commission of the Republic of North Macedonia dedicated for publishing voter turnout and election day results.

As regards age groups, significantly lower share of **younger populations**, i.e. those aged **18 to 39 years**, have reported voting at all elections (the same age group is also marked by the lowest share of affirmative responses to the question “For you personally, how important is voting at elections?”). However, there are no significant differences in responses according to ethnicity or gender of respondents (Chart 6).

**Chart 6.** .....

Q: After being entitled to universal suffrage, how often have you voted at elections?

- All/almost all elections
- Most elections
- Some elections
- Have not voted

**2020**



**2021**



Database: general population survey, all responses (N=1300)





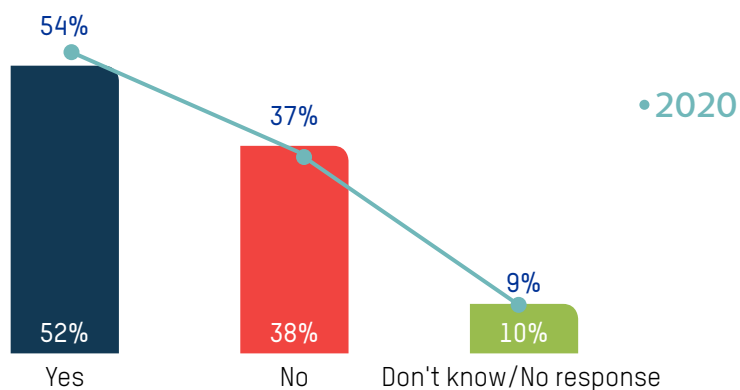
# 5. EU AND THE CITIZENS

This segment of the survey focused on citizens' attitudes about the European Union, their familiarity with and utilization of possibilities to join EU accession processes and to impact these processes.

As was the case last year, 2021 survey data show that more than half of citizens believe that, as important link in the democratic process, they can contribute to EU negotiations and accession. Moreover, it could be noted that the share of citizens that would join EU negotiations and accession processes is increased from 46% in 2020 to 53% in 2021. Such data are indicative of citizens' preparedness or at least desire for participation in these processes. Survey data also show the need for additional response on the part of institutions that would facilitate broader involvement of citizens in EU accession processes (Chart 7).

**Chart 7.** .....

Q: Would you personally join and would you make own contribution to the EU negotiations and accession process?



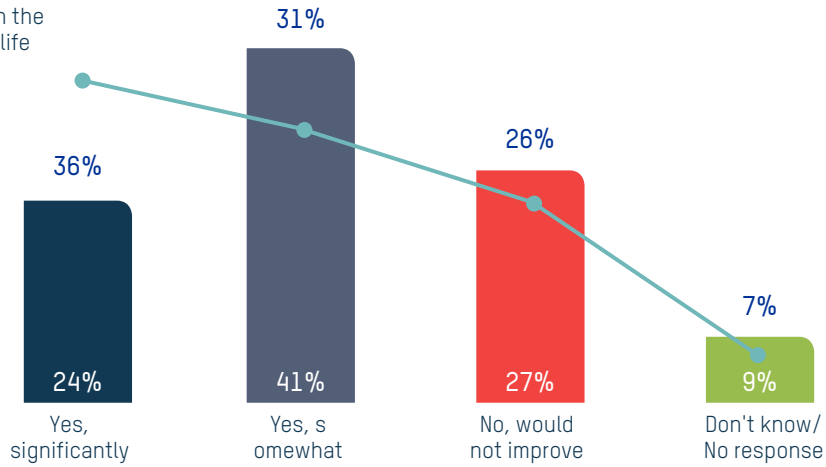
Similar to the situation in 2020, citizens believe that accession negotiations with the European Union have potential to improve their lives. There are no statistically significant differences among citizens' views on this question, but it is important to note that, over the last two years, **more than 60% of citizens believe that membership in the European Union would significantly or somewhat improve the life of citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia** (the sum of affirmative responses in 2020 was 66% and it accounts for 67% in 2021). While there are no significant differences in total number of affirmative and negative responses, the small decline in respect to importance under affirmative responses from the 2021 survey should be noted. Namely, under the baseline survey (2020), 36% of citizens were more certain on this matter, i.e. they believed their lives would be significantly improved, the relevant share under

the consequent survey is significantly lower and accounts for 24%, resulting in higher share of responses that imply lower level of certainty, i.e. “would somewhat improve” (Chart 8).

**Chart 8.**

Q: Do you believe that the country’s accession in the EU would improve the life of citizens?

• 2020

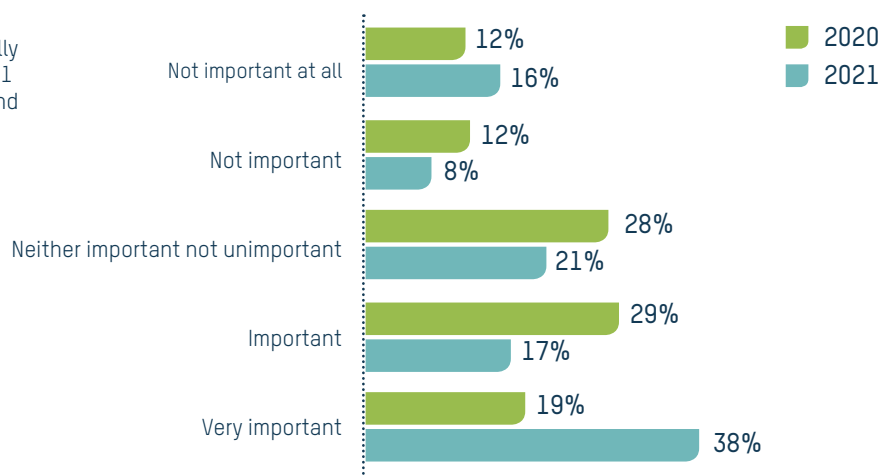


Young people indicated most strong belief that EU accession negotiations would improve the life of citizens in the country, with such belief being the lowest among elderly population (60+ years). Ethnic Macedonians are less optimistic compared to their Albanian counterparts, demonstrating slightly more prominent views that life would not improve (31% versus 17%).

In addition to changes expected from the EU accession process, citizens were also asked how important is the Republic of North Macedonia’s membership in the EU for them personally. While there are no significant differences in total number of positive and negative responses, it should be noted that importance of EU membership is marked by small decline among positive responses under the 2021 survey. In particular, under the baseline survey, 36% of citizens indicated greater certainty, i.e. belief, while in 2021 less than 40% of them assigned great importance to the country’s membership in the European Union (Chart 9).

**Chart 9.**

Q: How important is EU membership for you personally on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means not important at all and 5 means very important?



Database: general population survey, all responses (N=1300)

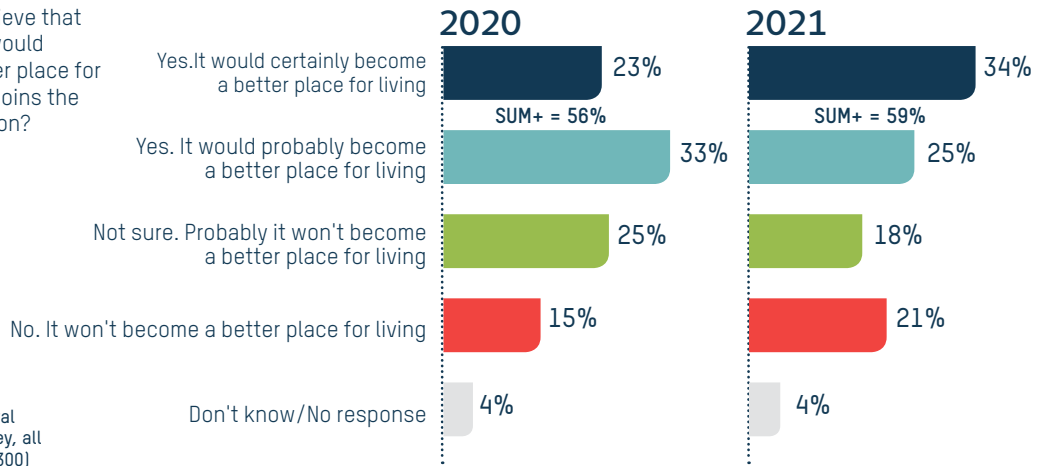
The same conclusion is made in respect to decreased share of responses on the question whether the country would become better place for living, but here it should be noted that the share of citizens believing that the country would most certainly become better place for living after joining the EU is increased by more than 10% (2020=23%; 2021=34%). Hence, more than

half of citizens believe that the country would become better place for living after joining the EU (Chart 10).

Ethnic Albanians (67%) and other communities (69%) demonstrate significantly higher belief that the country would become better place for living after EU membership compared to ethnic Macedonians (54%). In addition, it should be noted that respondents with higher education level are more likely to uphold high beliefs that the country would become better place for living after it joins the EU (same is valid for EU membership and EU negotiations).

**Chart 10.**

Q: Do you believe that the country would become better place for living after it joins the European Union?



Database: general population survey, all responses (N=1300)









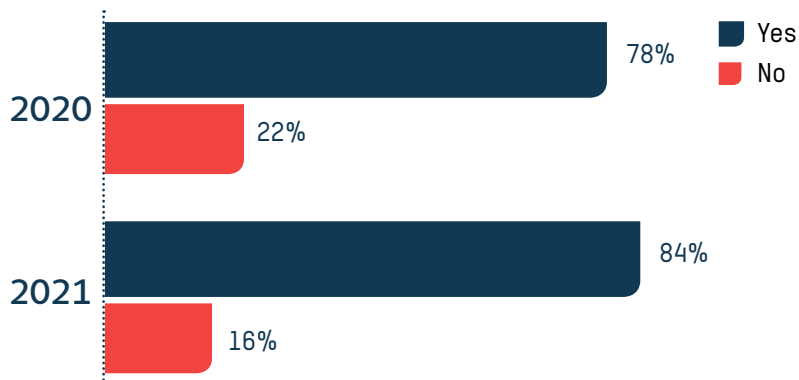
## 6. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, ACTIVISM AND COVID-19

This section of the research report provides an overview of key data and noteworthy trends in respect to civil society organizations and their participation in decision-making processes. However, given the significantly smaller sample under the 2021 survey, as indicated in the introduction above, the research team is unable to infer specific conclusions; however, it is important to observe key trends that emerge under both survey samples.

As regards data collected from civil society organizations, it could be said there is **greater awareness about civil society participation mechanisms** like the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society and the sector working groups within competent ministries (Charts 11 and 12).

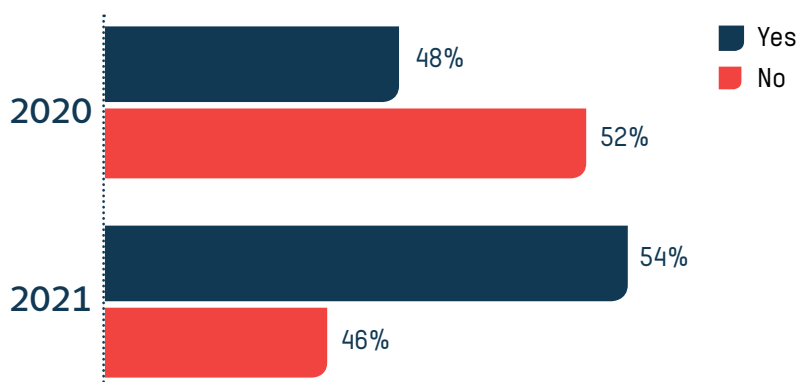
**Chart 11.**

Q: Have you heard about and are you familiar with the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society?



**Chart 12.**

Q: Have you heard about and are you familiar with the work of sector working groups?

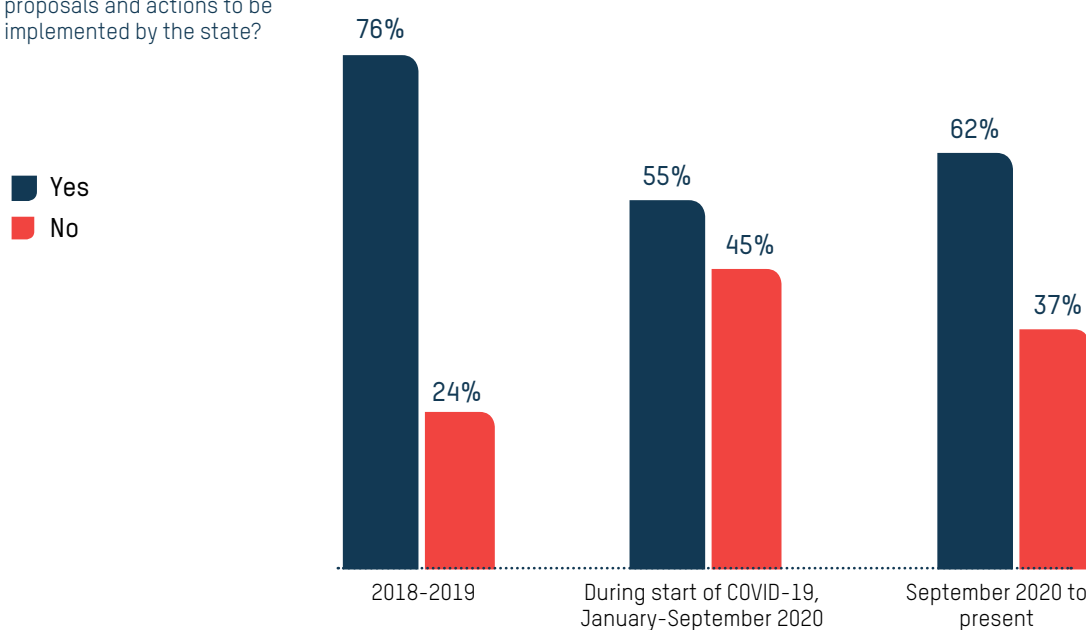


Based on responses obtained from civil society organizations, there is a significant decline in creation of policy proposals and actions at the start and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The share of civil society organizations that develop policy proposals is again increasing, but it should be noted that during the months when relief measures had been designed civil society organizations reported significantly lower engagement in creating policy proposals and actions that could be implemented by the state (Chart 13).

A significant correlation (.274) is observed in respect to civil society participation and creation of policy proposals and actions, on one side, and membership in civil society networks, on the other side. As was the case in 2020, organizations that have indicated network membership are more likely to be involved in creation of policy proposals and actions and to be engaged in advocacy for such proposals. **These data confirm the importance of networking and joint actions for civil society organizations** (Chart 14).

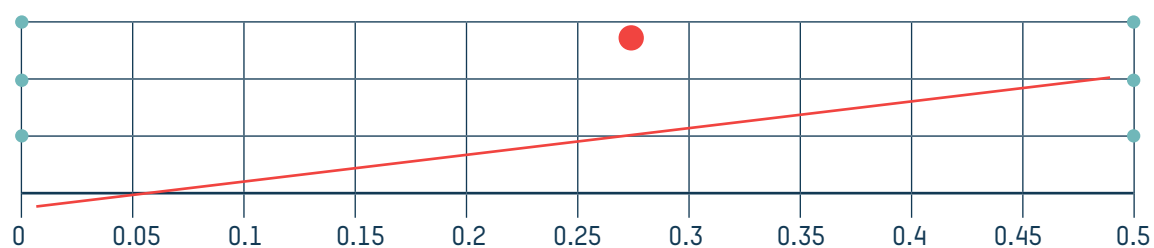
**Chart 13.** .....

Q: Did your organization develop and submit policy proposals and actions to be implemented by the state?



**Chart 14.** .....

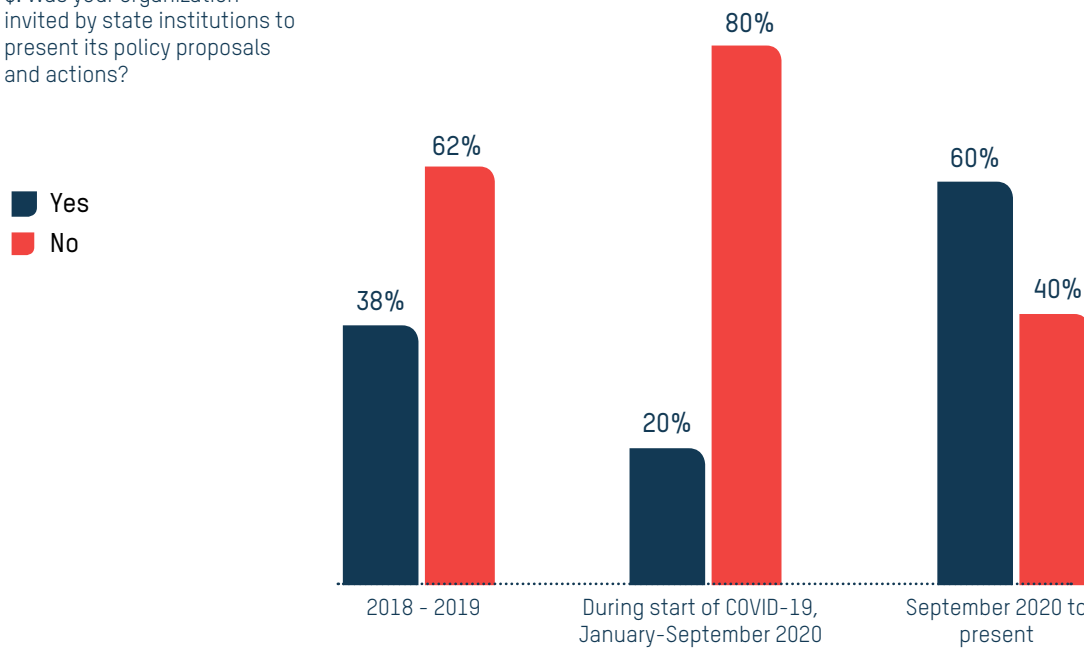
Correlation between network membership and creation of policy proposals and actions



Lower activity in respect to creation of policy proposals and actions to be implemented by the state could be directly linked to the failure on the part of institutions to invite civil society organizations. Based on survey data, it could be concluded that, at the start of COVID-19 crisis, state institutions have demonstrated significantly lower activity in inviting civil society organizations to join processes for creation of policy actions. On the other hand, in the period from September 2020 until the second survey, there is increased civil society participation, i.e. more than half of surveyed organizations indicated they have been invited by state institutions (municipalities, ministries, parliament or government)<sup>7</sup> (Chart 15).

**Chart 15.** .....

Q: Was your organization invited by state institutions to present its policy proposals and actions?

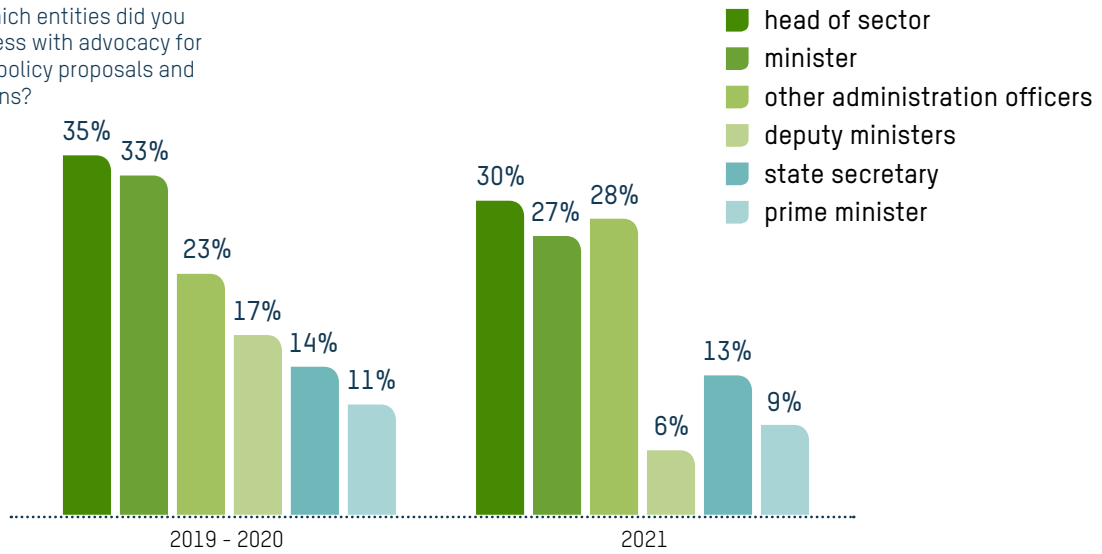


Most often, civil society organizations advocate for their proposals before heads of sectors at relevant ministries. Based on survey responses it could be concluded that irrespective of the time period examined, in general, organizations most often advocate before competent ministries that correspond to topics in their area of operation. Small differences that emerged in respect to particular type of institutional mechanism cannot be interpreted as meaningful due to the small survey sample (Chart 16).

<sup>7</sup> However, due to the small survey sample, this could also be a result of high probability for statistical errors in responses obtained and possibility that the survey questionnaire was completed by organizations that are more active and more frequently participate in these processes.

**Chart 16.**

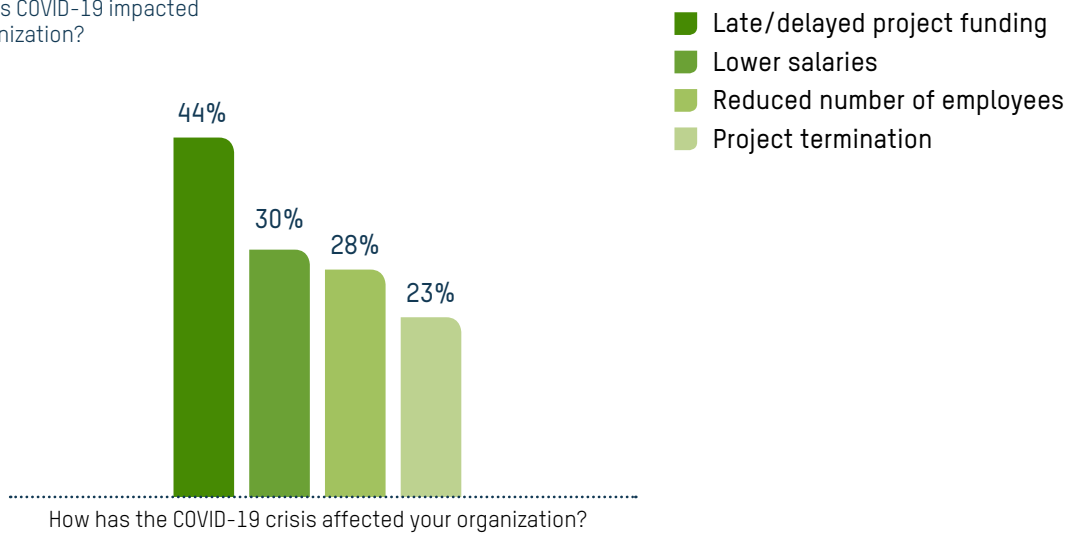
Q: Which entities did you address with advocacy for your policy proposals and actions?



34% of surveyed civil society organizations reported lack of sufficient equipment for work at home, while 66% indicated general lack of technology and digital equipment. Around 44% of organizations refer to delays in project funding due to the COVID-19 crisis, while 23% of them report termination/suspension of project funding in that period (Chart 17).

**Chart 17.**

Q: How has COVID-19 impacted your organization?





# 7. CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Civil engagement is additionally conditioned by opportunities to impact decisions. In 2021, seven out of ten citizens believe they are unable to impact decisions taken in the Republic of North Macedonia. To increase civil engagement and active citizenship, citizens need to be able to feel they can impact decisions in their municipality or at national level.

In general, survey data provide conclusions about several trends in civic engagement and methods for civic participation.

- Conventional civic engagement (voting at elections) is the most used method for participation. Contact activism is marked by minor increase in 2021, but it is important to note that the election process which took place closely to the time when the survey was conducted could have impacted responses on utilization of contact mechanisms by citizens to engage with political institutions in the state.
- On the other hand, there is decreased trend on participation in civic initiatives, but increased preparedness of citizens to engage in this type of initiatives in the future.
- Key factor for participation through contact mechanism or civic initiatives is citizens' confidence that they could truly impact decisions at local or national level. Hence, it is important to note that citizens still do not believe they can impact decisions at local level, and even less decisions at national level.
- Having in mind that there are no significant differences between the two rounds of survey, i.e. the share of citizens who believe they can impact decisions is the same in both years, it is important to use citizens' potential and desire to join civic initiatives and decision-making processes by improving the general impression about institutions and by increasing citizens' trust in them.
- Citizens demonstrate interest and potential for civic engagement in the EU accession process through different institutional mechanisms. Hence, further efforts are needed to advance institutional mechanisms for involvement of citizens in "contact" activism and civic participation.



**A solid share of citizens still believe that EU accession and membership could improve their life. However, significant share of young people (30+%) see themselves emigrating abroad in the next 5 years. Therefore, in order to improve participation among young people it is of exceptional importance to adjust “contact” mechanisms at state institutions to needs and possibilities of citizens.**

It could be said that more than half of citizens show some level of optimism concerning benefits from the EU accession process, including views that they could make meaningful contribution by participating in transformative processes envisaged under the EU negotiations and accession process. It is of great importance for citizens' optimism and potential to be used by state institutions and for additional efforts to be made towards designing mechanisms that will ensure greater civic engagement in these processes. Failure to use this potential and failure to involve citizens could lead to additional disillusionment among them and could give rise to negative trends in civic engagement as such, including additional loss of youth potential in the country.



**Civil society organizations can serve as additional bridge to advance civic engagement, not only through civic initiatives, but also as part of EU accession process, in their respective areas of expertise and contribution by means of submitting proposals aimed to advance policies and participation mechanisms.**

The COVID-19 crisis had a significant impact on civil society work and performance. Lower participation on the part of civil society organization also means less possibilities for organizations to assume the role of mediators between citizens and state institutions.

Expertise of civil society organizations needs to be taken into account and adequate mechanisms need to be designed to promote the process of mediation and to raise awareness among citizens about advocacy for their views and needs that is already in place. Nevertheless, the success of that process hinges on the need for institutions to demonstrate greater effort and take into consideration feedback provided by organizations, using them to advance specific policies and communication and management tools at local and national level and communicating this to citizens in adequate manner.

Networking of civil society organizations continues to be of great importance, primarily in respect to joint creation of ideas, policies and activities, but also in respect to greater involvement in advocacy processes, as well as involving citizens in these processes, even at the time of crisis. Hence, adequate conditions must be created for more successful networking and joint actions of organizations, while the legal framework, including funding for civil society networks, needs to be further promoted.

