



CIVIC PULSE SURVEY IN MACEDONIA:

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS



MARCH 2016

CIVICUS

Who We Are

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS strives to promote marginalised voices, especially from the Global South, and has members in countries throughout the world.

About Civic Pulse

In a rapidly changing world, we need simple, effective and reliable tools to track the frequent shifts in operating conditions for civil society. The Civic Pulse is an online survey, disseminated quarterly and designed to provide regular, customised and at-a-glance data on civic space. While the tool should certainly produce results of interest for researchers and academics, its use will be primarily for activists and civil society organisations themselves to make the case for improved conditions for civil society in their country and globally. The ultimate objective of the Civic Pulse is to present easily understood data, which will provide a basis for further investigation with deeper and more nuanced tools at the regional or country level. It should be viewed as a tool to direct further research, substantiate advocacy positions on shrinking civil society space or identify flashpoints for transformative citizen action. The Civic Pulse is one component of CIVICUS' new Civic Space Monitor (CSM) web platform due to be launched in September 2016.

INTRODUCTION

Between 21st January and 8th February 2016, CIVICUS and the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC) conducted the first Civic Pulse survey of civil society leaders in Macedonia. MCIC were responsible for dissemination of the survey questionnaire and results to CSOs in Macedonia, while CIVICUS took the lead on developing the Civic Pulse methodology and analysing results. Participants were asked to rate the conditions for civil society on the basis of a questionnaire that examines the respect for fundamental freedoms, funding trends, and civil society's impact on policy making and volunteering.

The Civic Pulse provides a snapshot of conditions for civil society in Macedonia at the present moment. It is one part of the development of a new set of tools at CIVICUS, which aim to track conditions for civil society around the world. Eventually, the intention is to produce better, timelier data that civil society can use to defend its space through fact based advocacy from the local to the global levels.

ABOUT THE SAMPLE

154 civil society leaders responded to the survey. 81% or 125 of those self-identified as representing civil society organisations (CSOs). That constitutes a sample of 3% of the 4,156 organisations registered as NGOs at the end of 2014, and that were likely to be active.¹ This being said, there are some important caveats to bear in mind. First, CIVICUS recognises that registered NGOs form but one portion of the overall civil society landscape in Macedonia, and that most official registers do not take into consideration informal groups, unregistered organisations and other entities, which that make up important components of the full diversity of civil society. Second, we are cognisant of the fact that official government statistics of numbers of registered organisations are often an inaccurate barometer of the 'size' and level of activity of the civil society sector. Third, although efforts have been made in the past to map civil society in Macedonia,² we acknowledge that, like in most countries, it is never possible to comprehensively describe and quantify each and every part of Macedonian civil society. Thus, when one considers that most mapping efforts struggle to capture the nature and activities of many informal, fluid and traditional citizen groupings, developing a truly representative 'sample' of civil society constitutes a precarious undertaking.

These concerns noted, the number of responses received, and the diversity within the sample gives us confidence that the survey represents a substantial spectrum of civil society voices drawn from a sample that provides a barometer of perceptions by a robust proportion of Macedonian civil society. Please see the final section of this report for a demographic breakdown of the respondent profile.

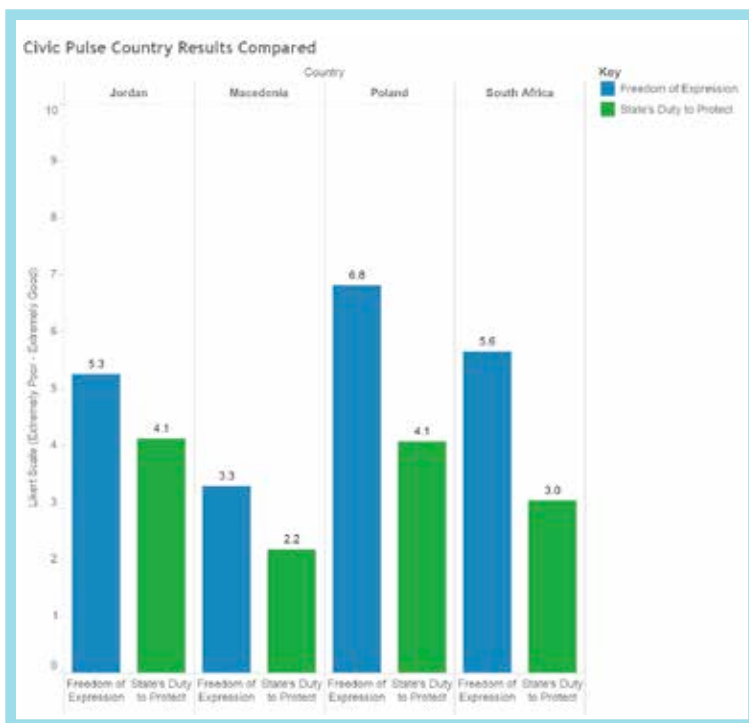
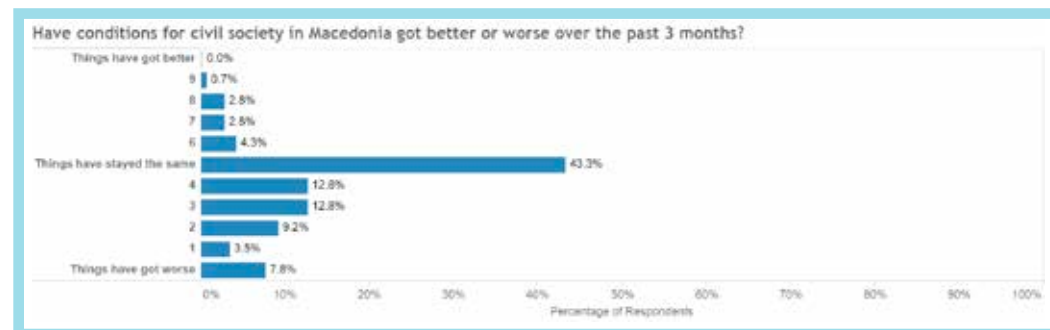
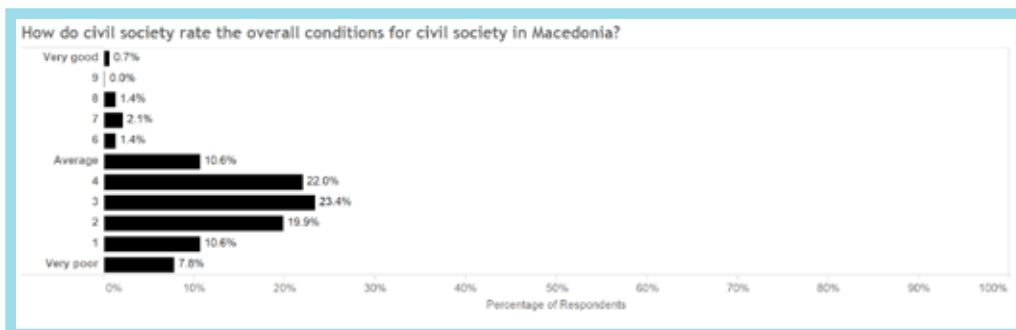
Preliminary findings from this study reveal a civil society that enjoys only limited civic space and feels vulnerable due to a lack of protection from the state. While freedom to form groups and to access and use the Internet are rated as roughly 'average', most other factors influencing conditions for civil society are rated very poorly by the majority of Macedonian civil society leaders.

1 This figure, from the Central Registry of Macedonia, is the number of CSOs that re-registered under a 2010 law. A study in 2015 also showed that, of those 95% submitted financial reports, indicating that this is a fairly accurate estimate of the number of *active* CSOs in the country. See more here, at p.34.: http://www.balkancsd.net/novo/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/63-12-Report-on-the-Economic-Value-of-the-Non-Profit-Sector-in-the-WBT_final.pdf

2 Pages 22-24 of the Civil Society Index (MCIC and CIVICUS) from 2011, provide a fascinating description of the social forces and civil society actors in Macedonia. Available here: <http://www.mcms.org.mk/images/docs/2011/civic-engagement-long-road-to-go-ar-2011.pdf>

FINDINGS

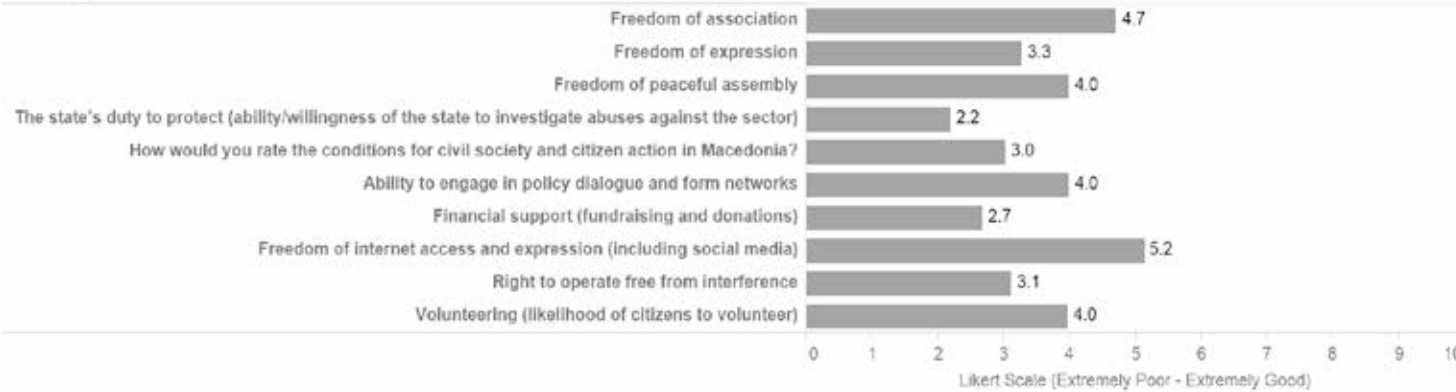
The Civic Pulse results demonstrate negative perceptions of the environment for civil society in Macedonia, with more than 80% of survey respondents stating that overall conditions are below average. It is striking that just 1 out of every 20 respondents say conditions are above average for civil society. Not only do CSOs rate current conditions poorly, a significant number – or 46.1% of respondents – believe that conditions have worsened in the last quarter. Just over 43% of respondents believe conditions are stable, while only 10.6% say that conditions for civil society



have gotten better over the past 3 months. The Civic Pulse also examines perceptions of the individual components of civic space, providing better understanding of the specific nature of the challenges facing civil society in Macedonia. These results indicate that civil society in Macedonia is most seriously concerned by the state's unwillingness to protect its members and investigate abuses against the sector. Macedonian civil society rate performance of the state against its duty to protect civil society at an average score of 2.2 on the 0 to 10 Likert scale. This score is lower than those given by civil society in other countries – Poland, South Africa and Tajikistan – previously polled through the Civic Pulse. This points to a serious failure on the part of the state, which has a duty to ensure that rules, laws and institutions of justice designed to protect civil society are upheld. In particular, it means that the state should ensure that those accused of abuses against the sector – for instance harassment of activists and journalists, violations of the right to peaceful assembly and interference with the legitimate work of CSOs – are investigated and prosecuted.

Analysis of the other individual indicators of the conditions for civil society in Macedonia show that only the freedom to access the Internet and express oneself online is rated above average. Interestingly, respondents rated the general indicator 'freedom of expression' far lower, at just an average of 3.3 on the 0 to 10 Likert scale. This finding could indicate that, as

Civic Space Indicators in Macedonia



traditional channels of communicating and organising are closed off, civil society in Macedonia is turning to cyberspace to support its work. It also reflects the fact that Internet access in Macedonia skyrocketed from just 2.49% of individuals in 2000 to 68.06% in 2014.³

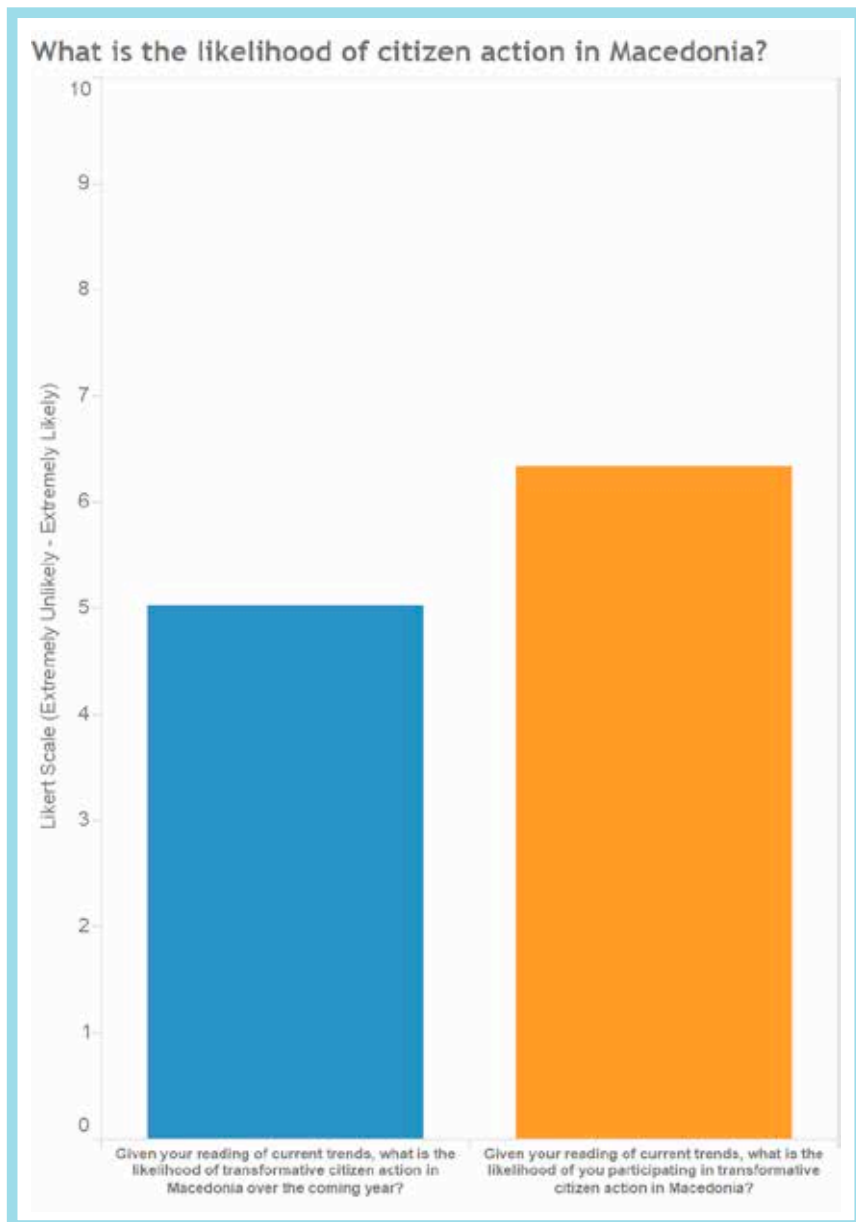
Civil society respondents rated all other components of conditions for civil society below average, with financial support, conditions for citizen action and the right to operate free

from interference faring worst. At just an average of 2.7 on the 0 to 10 Likert scale, the score for financial support is particularly striking, especially compared to scores given in other Civic Pulse surveys to date. It is a strong indicator that the overwhelming majority of civil society leaders in Macedonia are struggling to raise the funds needed to support their work.

Of the core components of civic space – the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression – Macedonian civil society leaders rate their freedom of association the strongest, although still at a below average rating. Despite the twin challenges of a lack of protection from the state and weak funding prospects, findings indicate that organisations still retain some space in which to be formed and operate in pursuit of their goals. Interestingly however, respondents provide a much lower score when asked how free their organisations are to operate without the interference of the state. Although this preliminary finding will need to be correlated with qualitative data on the situation in Macedonia, it could reflect a perception that CSOs are under surveillance, or that leaders are being harassed or otherwise intimidated. The low score for conditions for citizen action (an average of 3.0) is contrasted with responses when survey participants were asked how likely they were to participate in transformative citizen action in Macedonia over the coming year. Comparatively, this score is higher than all of those from previous Civic Pulse pilots, with the notable exception of South Africa, where the average score was 6 on the Likert scale. Although respondents in Macedonia only say mass mobilisation is averagely likely to occur, if it does, most civil society leaders say they are likely to play a part in those activities. This finding will be tracked over time with the Civic Pulse methodology.

WHAT IS CIVIL SOCIETY SAYING?

Here are a selection of quotes from the open fields in the survey, where respondents were asked to outline issues facing civil society in the near future:



‘Civil society needs to become **relevant** factor and be part of the changes’

‘Impartiality and **neutrality** of the sector towards political parties’

‘**Sustainability** of civil society’

‘Involvement in **policy** creation and law-making processes’

‘Networking (is still not used as potential), creation of **networks** and support by the media’

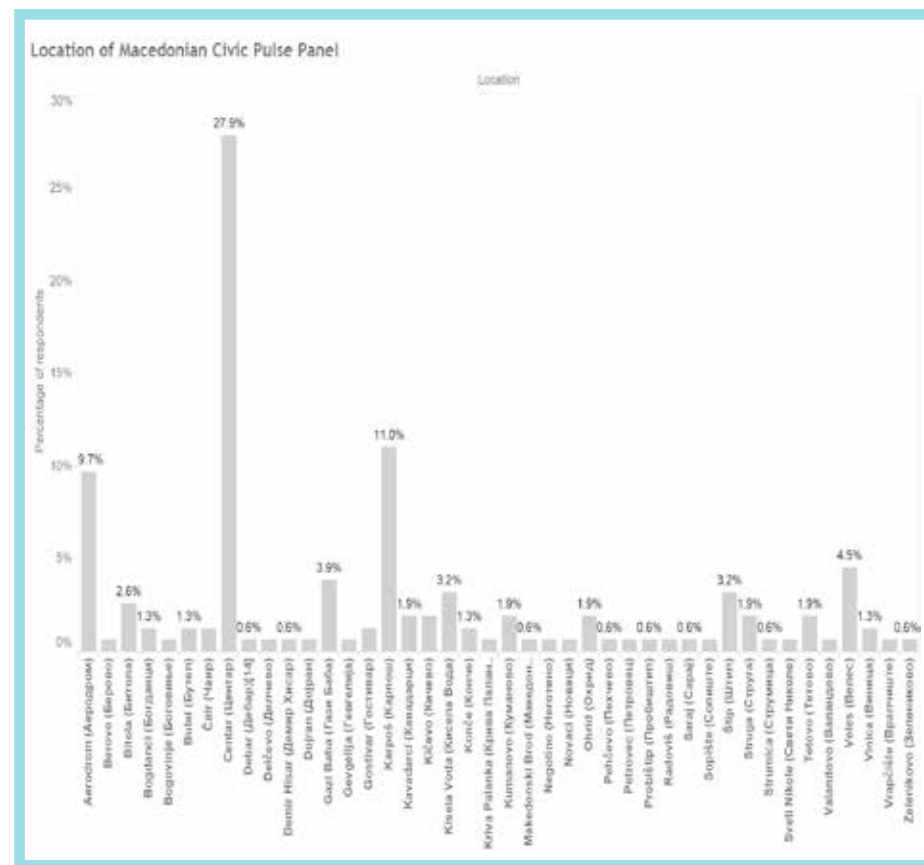
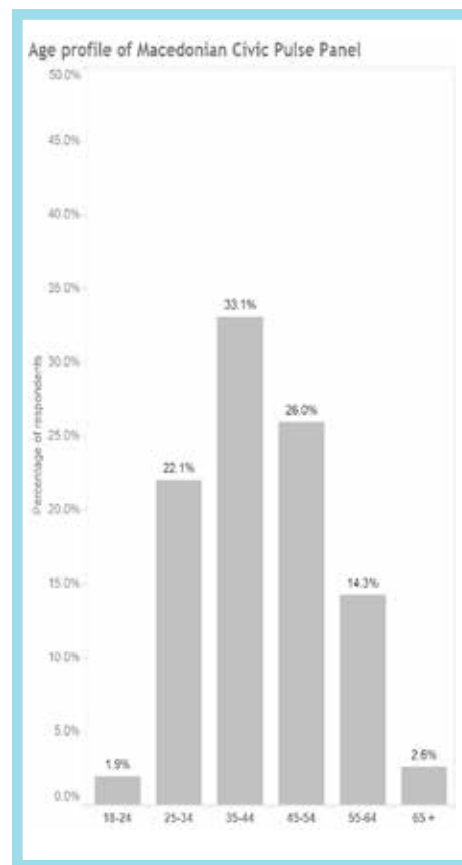
‘**Donor support** is not given in accordance to the needs (only project activities are being funded)’

‘Decontamination of the public space and reaffirmation of the **pluralism** of thought, freedom of expression and freedom of media’

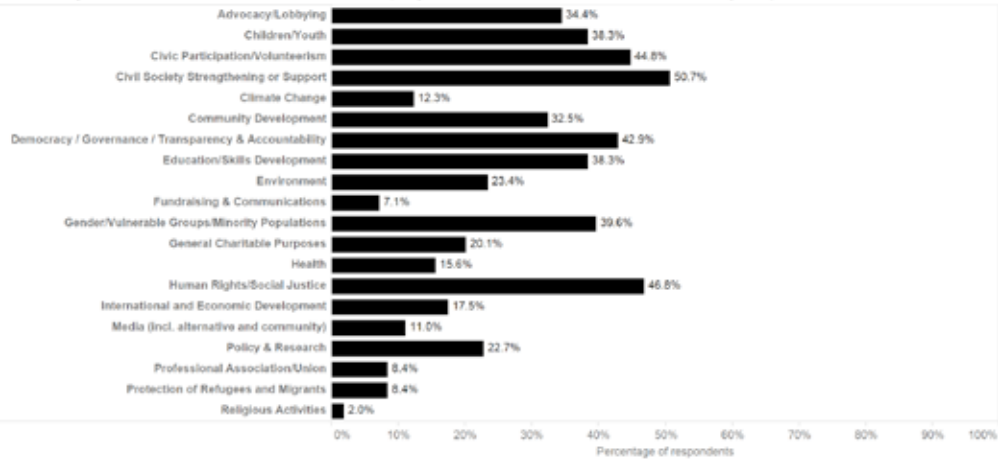
‘**Trust**/perception of citizens in civil society should improve’

PROFILE OF CIVIC PULSE MACEDONIA RESPONDENTS

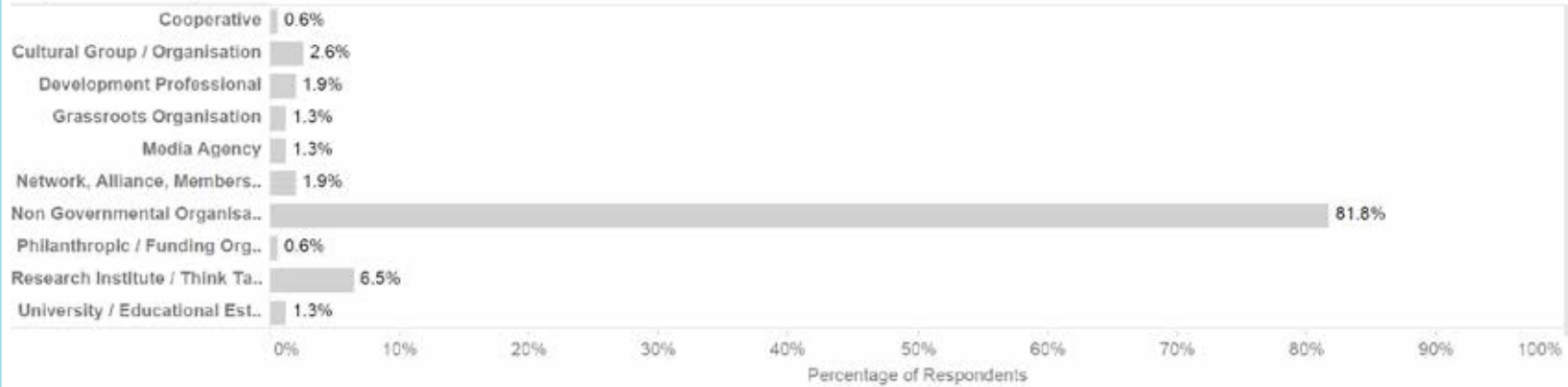
The following set of charts provides information on the gender, age, location, sector and organisational type of respondents to the Civic Pulse survey. They demonstrate that the survey achieved an almost perfectly equal number of responses from men and women, and that fully one third of respondents fall into the 25-44 age bracket. Just under three in ten respondents are based in the capital Skopje, while responses were received from people based in 42 different locations across the country. In terms of thematic profile, a wide variety of organisations responded to the survey, with civil society strengthening, human rights, democracy and volunteering being the most common areas of engagement amongst the sample. As mentioned above, over 80% of the sample self-identified as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), with a total of ten organisational types represented in the sample as a whole. Finally, most respondents operate at the national level in Macedonia, with smaller numbers engaged in local, regional or international work.



Thematic profile of Macedonian Civic Pulse Panel (respondents could choose more than one option)



Organisational profile of Macedonian Civic Pulse Panel



BACKGROUND NOTE

CONTEXT

In a globalised world driven by an unprecedented ability to share information, the reality of closing civic space is hard to hide. In order to provide a complete and current description of a constantly shifting terrain, we need robust tools that allow us to collect, curate and communicate the many strands of information about closing civic space. Of course, annually-updated indexes of democracy do exist, the media is filled with stories about disrupted protests and imprisoned journalists and local civil society organisations do a great job of calling attention to abuse in their own countries. Yet these sources of information are not triangulated, the voices of local groups are often missing from prominent international indexes and information can be months, if not years, out of date. Civil society advocacy at the global level is thus less effective than it should be.

WHAT IS CIVIC SPACE?

Civic Space refers to the basic conditions necessary for citizens and civil society organisations to play a full part in the democratic life of their countries. It is underpinned by respect for three basic freedoms: the freedom to form and operate organisations or 'associate'; the freedom of peacefully assemble through marches, demonstrations and other peaceful activities in public; and the freedom to express ideas and opinions and receive and impart information without interference. While laws may protect these freedoms in practice, their exercise in practice is underpinned by the duty of the state to protect civil society space in practice. This means ensuring laws protecting civil society are upheld and that those violating these rules are investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned.

WHAT IS THE CIVIC PULSE?

The Civic Pulse is a quarterly survey deployed to carefully selected "key leaders" in civil society. In conjunction with country partners, CIVICUS hopes to eventually identify between 300 and 500 prominent civil society leaders, and ask them to share their opinions through an online survey distributed every three months. The results presented in this paper are based on a survey deployed between January 21st and 8th February 2016 in Macedonia.

CIVIC SPACE MONITOR

The Civic Pulse is one participatory component that will be integrated into the forthcoming Civic Space Monitor (CSM). The CSM is an [online platform](#) that aggregates a variety of data sources to analyse civic space and present a final rating for each country. Civic space conditions in each country are described through the combination of eight discrete data elements. Each data element contributes both to the narrative information drafted by CIVICUS that accompanies each country page, as well as the CSM rating.

CIVICUS

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CITIZEN ACTION AND **CIVIL SOCIETY**
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