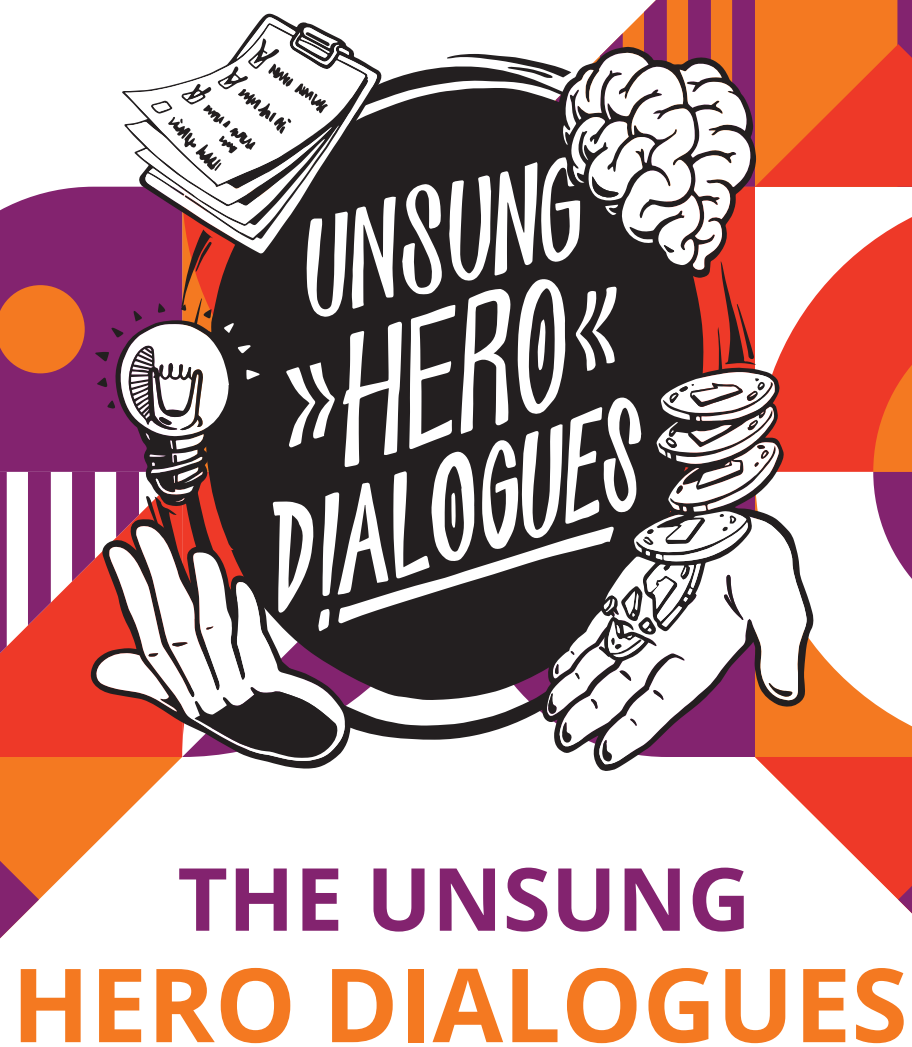


Thank you for being  
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Hero Dialogues!

2021



Promoting Solidarity and Diversity  
through Awareness and Policy Reform

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# Table of Contents

<b>/01</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>02</b>
------------	--------------------------	-----------

<b>The Unsung Hero Dialogues Project</b>	<b>05</b>
2.1. Project's goals and objectives	06
2.2. The consortium	07
2.3. Project's phases and timeline	11

**/02**

<b>The Survey: Presenting the data</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1. Survey's goals and objectives	14
3.2. Data collection and methodology	14
3.3. Main findings	16
3.4. Analysis and conclusion	27

**/03**

<b>/04</b>	<b>Project Products</b>	<b>35</b>
	4.4. The Autumn School	36
	4.5. Campaigns	38
	4.6. Policy paper	38

**/05**

<b>Local events</b>	<b>40</b>
5.1. Raising awareness and policy meetings	41
5.2. Germany	41
5.3. Italy	44
5.4. Portugal	47
5.5. Greece	52
5.6. Estonia	54
5.7. Romania	56

<b>/06</b>	<b>Policy recommendations</b>	<b>59</b>
------------	-------------------------------	-----------

<b>/07</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>71</b>
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# /01

## *Executive summary*





# ***The Unsung Hero Dialogues Promoting Solidarity and Diversity through Awareness and Policy Reform.***

Fairness, equality, respect – these fundamental elements of community are at the heart of civil society itself, of civic education, and help us get out of bed in the morning. There is a world to be saved and an impact to be had, one step at a time towards Utopia.


As millions of Euros are spent on the financing of civil society by governments, European institutions, and private foundations every year, tens of thousands of youngsters and adults alike are going on thousands of youth exchanges, workshops, and conferences, and a whole third sector of the European economy is kept busy supplying the demands, how are we doing?

**“**  
*This booklet contains  
the record of a 18-month  
conversation about  
exactly those questions.*

Starting from those very issues at the core of our work in civil society – fairness, equality and respect – the Unsung Hero Dialogues were set up to be the start of a discussion, both internally as a point of reflection and externally with decision makers and the broader public.

What does it mean to be a civil society worker in Europe? What economic challenges and opportunities are prevalent in the third sector? What can be done to improve that situation? And how can we communicate these ideas to others? – these are just some of the questions we tried to ask with the Unsung Hero Dialogues.





While discussing these issues is important, the project consortium also wanted to address them more proactively – with the development of policy recommendations both for the national/regional contexts represented in the project and the European level, as well as an exploratory study of the working conditions of civil society workers in Europe. These contributions are aimed at providing some more practical input and data to the discussion.

The Unsung Hero Dialogues consisted of 46 activities implemented between April 2020 and September 2021 by its project consortium in Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Romania. It was funded by the Europe for Citizens programme and supported by local partners.

We sincerely thank you for your interest in our work and hope you may find it useful.

***The coordinating team:***

**Moritz Borchardt, Aleksandra Polivana,  
Tamara Puerto, Valentin Rühlmann,  
Robert Nesirky.**



/02

*The Unsung  
Hero  
Dialogues  
Project*

## 2.1. *Project's goals and objectives*

The project «*The Unsung Hero Dialogues - Promoting Solidarity and Diversity through Awareness and Policy Reform*» aims to increase awareness among the European public of the importance of civic engagement in social and political discourse, as well as to increase the competence and capacity of NGOs, as one of the main institutions advocating for and promoting European values, such as respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

***To achieve these objectives the project will focus on:***

- 1** *Increasing attention on the economically unstable position of young activists, working in small-sized NGOs;*
- 2** *Empowering young activists to advocate for their rights through collective actions by creating local and international networks among small CSOs within Europe and building a direct dialogue with policy makers;*
- 3** *Increasing awareness of the importance of civil society by making an international campaign promoting European values and the importance of civic education to a wider public.*

CGE Erfurt e.V. and its partners in Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania, including the transnational European DARE network implemented a total of 46 events (42 local and 4 international events) with the involvement of 275 direct participants in each country from April 2020 to September 2021. The project started with conducting a professional survey in order to receive statistical data on the economic situation of civil society in the EU. After the survey the Autumn School for young activists took place with the aim of promoting the value of civil society including the development of promotional campaigns by its participants. In parallel, each partner organization conducted 4 local meetings of CSWs (civil society workers) to share their ideas and discuss issues and challenges in CS activists' work and create policy recommen-

dations. Those policy proposals were combined by the project consortium into policy recommendations towards public institutions on the European level and were presented to the public during its final event.

Our combination of local and transnational events, research and outreach, public discussions and policy reform with partners from across the EU allowed the Unsung Hero Dialogues to target a wide variety of areas and actors. In the absence of (much) data on the economic situation of civil society organizations, and the employees and freelancers in civic education, the project's own survey will serve as a starting point to talk about solidarity, values and active citizenship from a supply-side point of view. Solidarity, empathy and equal rights for all can only be widespread if educating about them is an economically viable option and fuelled by more than idealism alone.

Successfully promoting and engaging in European values and history, solidarity and civic competences, the past, present and future of Europe all are dependent on the possibility and financial ability of organizations, institutions and individuals to do so. In our project we included the voices of as wide a variety of people as possible: from those working in civic education (survey, local events on policy) to the broader public (public discussions, autumn school, awareness campaign, final conference) and policy makers (local events on policy, awareness/advocacy efforts).

## **2.2. *The Consortium***

For the authentic purpose of the project, the consortium of project partners was selected and synergised based on the extensive experience of participating organisations and their people. the project is made in cooperation between CULTURE GOES EUROPE - Soziokulturelle Initiative Erfurt e.V. (Germany), Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (Belgium), Jaan Tonissoni Insituut MTU (Estonia), Associazione Promozione Sociale Lafenice Associazione Sportiva (Italy), Institutul Intercultural Timisoara (Romania), UMAR-Uniao de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta Associacao (Portugal), United Societies Of Balkans Astiki Etaireia (Greece).



## CGE Erfurt e.V.



CGE Erfurt e.V. is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Erfurt, founded in 2005 and run by young professionals, who are designing, implementing and evaluating local and international projects. Our work is based on our four main areas of activity, civic education, employability, media literacy, and sustainability & well-being in the framework of which we implement local and international projects. While a majority of activities is targeted at young adults, our overall projects range from cooperations with public schools to week-long workshops with experts and weekly meetings/trainings with adult migrants to strengthen civil society in rural areas of the state of Thuringia. Since our founding in 2005, we have, consequently, built strong relationships with both local partners and frequent international collaborators that allow us to successfully engage in a wide variety of initiatives and issues.

## The Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (DARE) Network



The Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe (DARE) Network was officially launched on 28 June 2003 in Antwerp. DARE is registered under Belgian NPO law as a non-profit organization and has its legal seat in Belgium. DARE is a Europe-wide network of NGOs and other educational providers devoted to raise the profile of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE), promote transcultural and transnational cooperation, and enhance the quality of education within these fields. DARE aims at achieving recognition, visibility and adequate resources for EDC and HRE as a core obligation for the formal and non-formal education systems throughout Europe. In relation to work with youth the debate remains not an empty phrase but needs to be re-discussed and answered every time from the scratch. Thus, the experience of self-efficacy, of political participation of young people is a core question for the Work of the DARE network since its establishment in 2003.

## Jaan Tõnisson Institute



JTI was founded in 1991 and the NGO is dealing with education, social issues, development areas, fostering democracy throughout this time. JTI has expertise in providing educational events (lectures, study visits), developing educational materials, providing expertise in different issues relevant to the organisation's scope. For instance, Mr Valdmaa has served as Council of Europe Expert, he has conducted the work of UNESCO Chair at the Jaan Tõnisson Institute.

## La Fenice



La Fenice was born from the expertise and experiences of young people grown up through YiA projects, volunteering, the national civil service and the Youth Centre OFF. The aim of the organisation is to promote culture, youth participation and non-formal education. Key direction of the NGO's work: 1) CULTURE to promote access of young people to culture; to support actions aiming at culture development, innovation and creativity as key elements of active citizenship. 2) EDUCATION to develop non formal and peer to peer education opportunities; to offer training opportunities at both local, national and European level. 3) PARTICIPATION to involve young people in decision making processes in order to promote their contribution to the development of sustainable policies shaped on young people views, opinions and ideas; to foster dialogue, even through 2.0 web technologies and ICT; to promote participation actions through schools; to promote volunteering.

## The Intercultural Institute Timisoara



The Intercultural Institute Timisoara is an organisation from Romania working in the field of intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. IIT is a non-governmental organisation, autonomous and without financial profit, with educational, cultural, civic and scientific activity, without political goals, that promotes the values and principles of the Council of Europe. The IIT is a member of CIVITAS network and is



the coordinator in Romania of the program Project Citizen which aims to prepare teachers use an interactive method for education for democratic citizenship, which involves proposing public policies in response to problems identified in the community. The IIT has an extensive experience promoting active citizenship through educational projects addressed to adults but also young people, members of national minorities communities, especially Roma, members of migrant communities and other vulnerable groups.

## **UMAR – União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta**



UMAR – União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta (in English, UMAR – Women's Association Alternative and Response) is a feminist women's association (non-governmental, non-profit organization, collective person of public utility) founded in 1976 with national headquarters in Lisbon, and having active delegations in Braga, Porto, Coimbra, Viseu, Lisboa, Almada, Madeira (island) and Azores (archipelago). UMAR has support structures - assistance (personal and by phone) and accompaniment (psychological, psychosocial and juridical) for women victims of domestic violence, with established cooperation agreements with the Portuguese government for its work in this area for more than a decade, having: 2 Domestic Violence Emergency Centres/ Daily Crisis Centres; Two shelters from the national network of shelters for battered women and their children; 6 Protected Transition Apartments.

## **United Societies of Balkans**



United Societies of Balkans since 2008 has implemented and involved in many local and international activities. It has coordinated and implemented successfully more than 300 international projects. In addition it has hosted more than 3,000 youngsters in different programmes based on formal and non-formal education, by trying to underline the important role of experiential learning and non-formal education and to include tools and methods of the non-formal education to the mainstream education. The organisation therefore has a very rich experience in organizing international youth activities and gives the

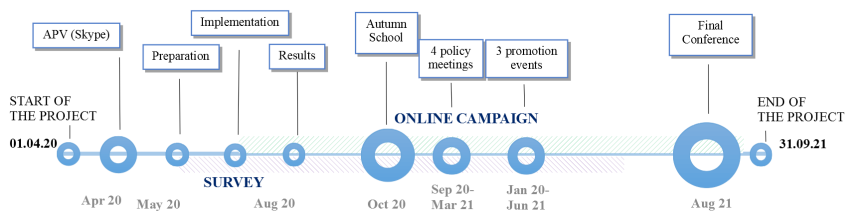


opportunity to local youngsters to meet and interact with other youngsters from Europe. The organisation's target group is youth between 16 to 30 years old, regardless of their educational, cultural, ethnic, social, etc. background and its activities are always based on the needs and interest of them and the society.

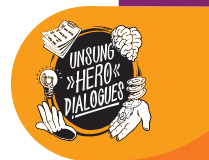
## 2.3. *Project's phases and timeline*

This project consisted of 7 activities, that despite the COVID-19 pandemic all happened according to the initial time plan, with some of them being shifted to online or hybrid format:


1. **A1** Preparatory Meeting
2. **A2** Professional survey
3. **A3** Autumn School
4. **A4** Online Campaign
5. **A5** 4 Local meetings on Policy
6. **A6** 3 Local Promotional Events
7. **A7** Final Conference



**"** *The global pandemic caused significant changes in the flow of the project.*



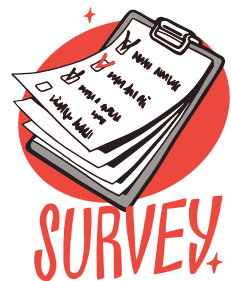
Nearly all activities and interactions were shifted online. Therefore, the survey, been spread through online channels only, was extended until the



end of local events. General project promotion was focused only on on-line sources. Despite the hardship and the middle of the pandemic, the project team managed to organise the Autumn school within the initially planned period and in a new manner – the hybrid version connecting physical participants coming from different countries with online audience, the presence of which spread beyond Europe. After the successful and very inspiring results from the autumn school, partner organisations planned the local events in various formats, knowing for sure that when there is an interest from people any format will work. Up to that moment the pandemic situation was still uncontrolled, therefore the majority of local events took place online. However, with the situation getting better and more relaxed time limits, some partners managed to organise physical events, that brought even more ideas to the table. Finally, the International Conference took place as planned, gathering people from different countries, marking the end of the project and the beginning of new ideas.

# /03

## *The Survey: Presenting the data*



### **3.1. *Survey's goals and objectives***

The UHD Survey was a continuation of a first one that was conducted in 2018 by a group of volunteers that included members of the later UHD consortium and reached 119 people. The current survey was focused on a larger number of participants, a specifically targeted group of participants, as well as an academic methodology of the questionnaire. Conducting this survey allowed us to learn more about the economic situation of civil society activists and to determine further directions for the promotion of their rights.

This explanatory survey aimed at gaining a better and broader understanding of the labour situation among civil society workers in Europe. In order to collect data on this issue, the partnership planned an on-line survey addressed to civil society workers. In this frame, civil society workers are understood as every person engaged in civil society, regardless of their formal working status including: volunteers, freelancers, employees or employers, consultants, trainers, etc.

### **3.2. *Data collection and methodology***

The survey was launched in June 2020 with a goal of 500 completed questionnaires by the end of the project, and the questionnaire was filled out on a voluntary basis. The survey was closed at the end of June 2021, with a total of **534 responses**. The invitation to fill out the questionnaire was publicized by the partner organisations on social media (Facebook, LinkedIn), by email and newsletter. The invitation to fill out the questionnaire was also spread via partner organization networks and umbrella organisations, i.e., bridge 47 and the Lifelong Learning Platform.

We ensured the anonymity of the answers following the EU Regulation 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation). The data collected will not be sold or shared with any third parties not involved in the Unsung Hero Dialogues project.

There is generally a lack of data and information on civil society workers and organizations in European and national member institutions. The data collected in this survey is an explanatory study which helps to assemble the puzzle of the European civil society work sector, but it is not representative of the European civil society worker population at large.

***The questionnaire was composed of six sections:***

- 1** *Kind of occupations and types of organisations;*
- 2** *Work experience;*
- 3** *Work satisfaction;*
- 4** *Professionalisation of the working field;*
- 5** *Labour rights;*
- 6** *European initiative for labour rights.*

In order to supplement the quantitative data collected through the survey, interviews were conducted with experts and practitioners in various civil society sectors at both the international (European) and national levels. In order to gather a diverse set of perspectives, interviewees representing six types of organizations/sectors were selected: youth organizations; academia; labour union/legal; institutional, non-EU, and European-level civil society organizations. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted between April and August of 2021 by six interviewers who represented the project team.

These interviews have been focused in particular on five main topics- these have been identified through a participatory process among the partnership staff and the Autumn school (2020) participants.

- ◆ *Understanding of Civil Society both as a work sector and as a part of society with a political vision and perspective.*
- ◆ *Value of the voluntary-based characteristic and professionalised component of CS in nowadays societies.*
- ◆ *Working conditions in CS work sector*
- ◆ *Recognition of the role and value of the CS sector in society and in the economy: benefits and drawbacks of increased professionalisation of the sector.*
- ◆ *The role of CS as a work sector and a political lever in the future of our societies and democracies.*



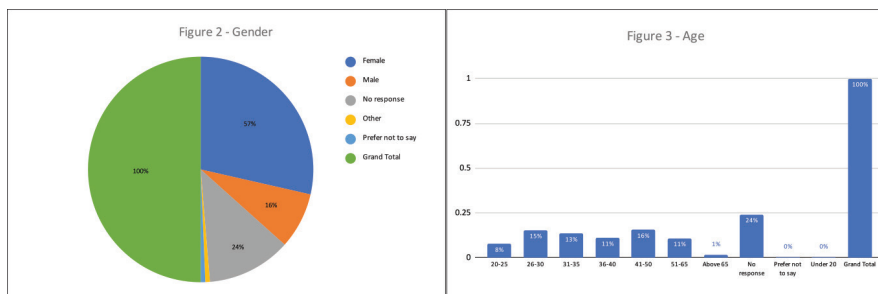
The analysis process consisted of identifying the different perspectives collected with the exploratory interviews as well as the convergent elements. As mentioned, the purpose of the interviewees is to gain situated and well-informed insights from the CSOs or experts in order to enrich the analysis of the data collected through the survey.

### 3.3. *Main findings*

As the survey was divided into several sections presented earlier, we present the data and the elaboration of main findings with the division to the separate sections.

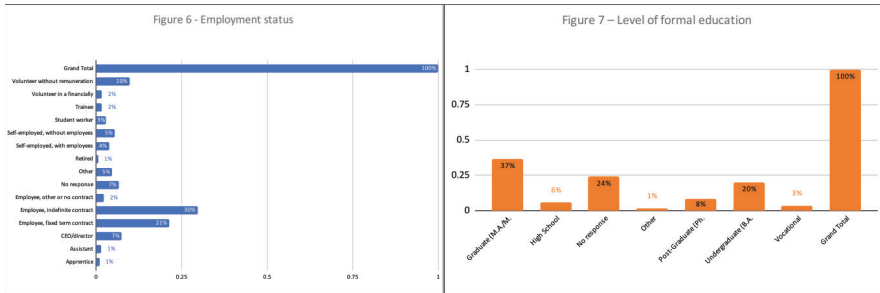
#### *Demographics of survey respondents*

**The data of the survey showed us that the majority of survey respondents are female at 57%.** Only 16% indicated they are male, confirming that the ‘third sector’, as it is often called, is predominantly female. Around 26% of respondents either did not complete this question, elected not to share their gender or marked ‘Other’. It should be noted that demographic questions came at the end of the survey, which is why there is a higher share of people that did not respond to the questions in this section. In terms of age, respondents were distributed fairly evenly across age groups between 20 and 65 years of age.



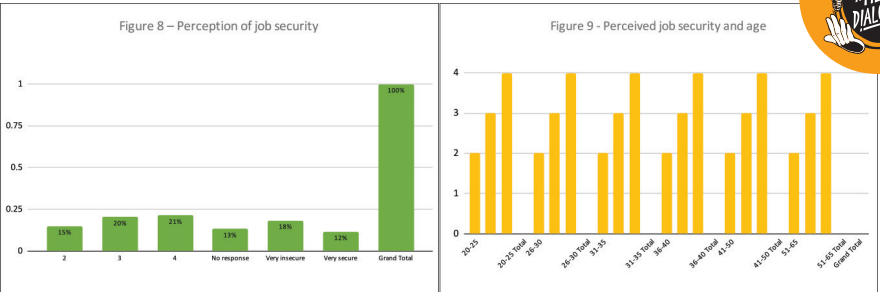
The majority of survey respondents are located in urban areas, with 32% and 23% in cities (population of 100,000 - 1 million) and metropolises (population of over 1 million), respectively. We further looked at the correlation between this rural/urban variable for each of the five countries with the highest number of responses. We noticed that the

only country where the majority of respondents are not based in cities or metropolises, is Italy, where the highest percentage live in towns. The majority of respondents are employees with permanent contracts (30%), while the second highest response was employees with a fixed-term contract (21%). **Unpaid volunteers make up 10% of the total, reflecting the often voluntary nature of the civil society sector.** The statistic showing that the majority of respondents have permanent positions is counter to expectation, given the typically assumed precariousness of the CS sector. Lastly, Figure 7 shows the level of education reported. The vast majority have a tertiary degree: 20% at the undergraduate level, 37% with a Master's, and 8% with a PhD.



# Work conditions: job security and income

In recent decades, job security has declined in every work sector, particularly in the wake of the 2007 financial crisis. The civil society was not left out of this trend, so it is particularly interesting to see in Figure 8 that respondents were fairly evenly split as to their perception of job security. 33% felt to some extent insecure, 33% felt to some extent secure and 20% responded as neutral. There is no clear pattern when looking at the level of security against the variable of age.



We further explored the job security variable by analysing it in combination with the variable indicating whether someone has a position that is dependent on project-based funding or one that is independent of project-based funding. We find that there is low to moderate correlation between having a job that is independent of project funding and feeling more secure in one's job. ***Those who are in project-based contracts (dependent) are more likely to feel insecure.*** A relatively high number of respondents selected "other" in reporting whether their position was project-based or not, so it would be interesting in the future to see what other types of positions this category may include.

In focusing on the economic recognition of their work, respondents in 39% of cases do not think their income reflects the value and impact of their work for society. 26% think they have fair economic recognition, and 14% expressed a neutral position.

Looking at overall financial security of workers in the sector is also vital for understanding work conditions. As Figure 12 shows, ***48% of respondents report that their income does not or barely covers living expenses in their countries,*** compared to 33% who agree that their salary is sufficient. Not surprisingly, Figure 13 shows that those who say their income does cover expenses are also more likely to say the income reflects the societal value of the work at least to some extent. For those that say their income does not or barely covers expenses, this trend is reversed; they are more likely to say it does not reflect the societal value of the work.



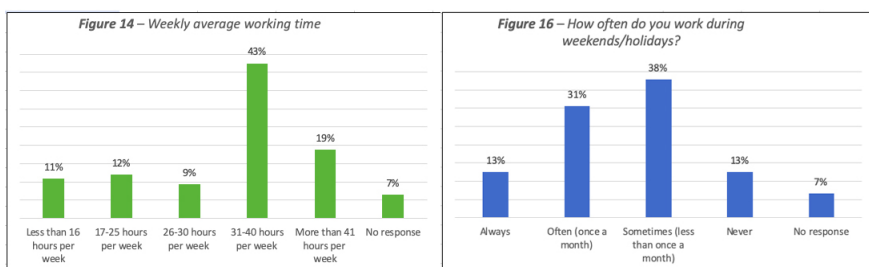
Depening our statistical understanding of job security and income of



professionals in CS sectors will further the discussion on pay and afford attention to the motivations of people employed in the sector. Generally speaking, the risk is that CS sectors are considered to be voluntary, and also that professionals in the field themselves justify the lack of job security or economic recognition in relation to the social utility that their work provides. This (macro and micro) perception prevents professionals from claiming recognition of their labour rights.

## Work-life balance

As shown in Figure 14, the majority of respondents work in full-time positions of 31 to 40 hours per week (43%). 19% regularly worked extra hours – more than 40 hours per week. A total of 21% work between 17 and 30 hours per week and 11% work under 16 hours per week in their respective roles. In addition to their primary roles, respondents reported on average 5 hours of volunteer work during a week on other projects. Another results showed that a vast majority of participants report working on weekends or holidays at least some of the time (total of 82%). Broken down, we see that 44% ‘often’ or ‘always’ work weekends or holidays and 13% ‘never’ do.

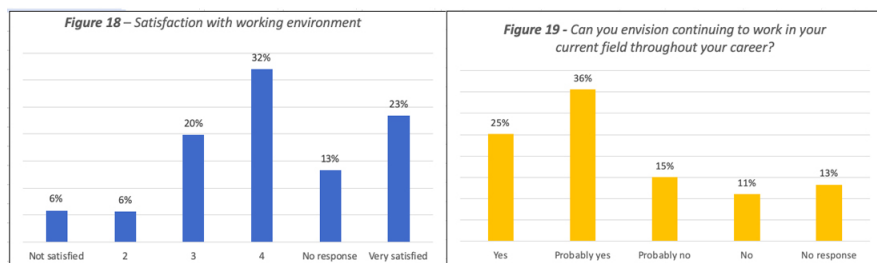


Despite these responses which point generally to a perceived reasonableness of time dedicated to work, 34% said work negatively impacts other areas of life at least some of the time. 33% reported never or rarely feeling that work negatively impacts their life compared to 21% which said it always or often does. Of course, the amount of time dedicated to work is not the only factor which may influence this variable. Certainly deadline pressure, instability of work conditions, and income may also play a role.



## Job Satisfaction

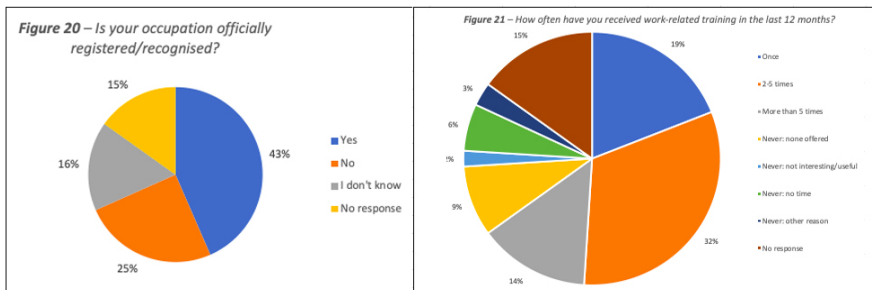
The survey also sought to understand better satisfaction with work conditions. Figure 18 shows that there is generally a high degree of satisfaction among respondents. A total of 55% reported feeling at least somewhat satisfied, in comparison to just 12% who were at least somewhat dissatisfied and 20% who responded neutrally.



Given this relatively high degree of satisfaction, we would expect that respondents may be interested in continuing to work in these capacities into the future. This is confirmed in Figure 19, where we see that 25% say they can imagine continuing to work in their current field throughout their career, 36% saying ‘probably yes’, 15% saying ‘probably no’ and, finally, 11% clearly saying they will not. These two points do not encapsulate a full picture of job and career satisfaction, but it gives limited insight into the motivations that compel workers’ in the civil society sector. Of course, this is likely to vary by specific profession and other conditions, but it is nevertheless interesting to see how satisfaction applies to the sector as a whole.

## Professionalisation of the field

Several questions were included in the survey which attempted to evaluate the level of professionalisation of the CS sector. First, the question of whether respondents’ occupation is officially registered or recognized was posed (Figure 20), with 43% affirming that it is. 16% said they ‘did not know’, reflecting a low level of awareness about the official recognition of professions and related rights. Future analysis should investigate this question of recognition in combination with data on profession and by country.

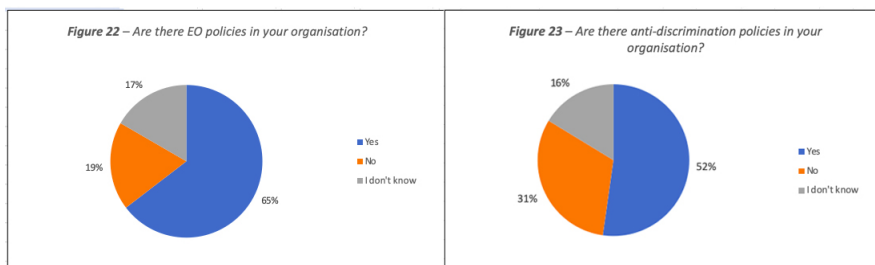


Another feature of a professionalised field may be the existence of professional training opportunities. This is not to say that lacking professional training opportunities precludes a field from being professionalised, but it does point to some degree of a networked field and investments at the organizational or field levels to continue skill-building. For this reason, a question about training attendance was included. As seen in Figure 21, 20% of respondents had not attended a professional training in the previous 12 months, 9% of whom said it was because there was no training offered to them. Conversely, 65% reported attending at least one, with the majority taking part between 2 and 5 times. Given that the survey was distributed by UHD partner organisations, it is plausible that the survey participants are more likely to be engaged with networks with access to and information about training opportunities, which may bias the sample. In order to more fully understand the relation between professional development participation and degree of professionalisation, further research is needed.

## Equal opportunity and inclusion

As Figures 22 and 23 show, the majority of respondents state that their organisations have effective inclusion or equal opportunity policies (65%) and anti-discrimination and/or harassment policies (52%). 17% and 16% report not knowing the answer to these questions respectively, which is interesting in the project frame, because it could be interpreted as a lack of knowledge about the rights and services workers should have access to. It would be useful to understand more deeply the characteristics of the policies and of the workers that have access to these (e.g., those that have permanent contracts, the level of the contract type, specific profession, etc.).



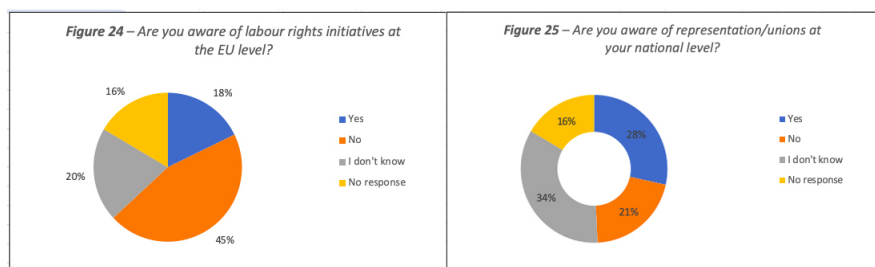


**Equal opportunity and inclusion are important issues in the civil society sector as well as in all other employment sectors.**

Looking at the data collected through the survey, but also data that focuses on individual sectors included in the broader civil society sector - education, human rights, international cooperation - one can see that these sectors are highly feminized, meaning that the majority of people employed are women. The majority of those working at the executive level are women, but in many cases those at a coordinating or managerial level are men. The sector under analysis therefore does not differ from the characteristics of the labour market in general. As can be easily guessed, this is the result of a cultural system that shapes the labour market, the organizational culture and the behaviours of men and women. A culture still strongly influenced by gender stereotypes that still produces dynamics of horizontal and vertical segregation in training and occupations, which means that women are more dedicated to the educational, health and care sectors in general, while men are more committed to technical and scientific sectors. In addition, again for reasons related to traditional gender roles and stereotypes, the civil society sector is not particularly attractive to men given the precariousness of employment contracts, low wages, lack of full recognition of professionalism and the absence of career prospects. Women who encounter greater obstacles in entering, remaining and progressing in the labour market tend to look for a job with meaning - with a mission - and since their principal within their families is not the salary they earn, to settle for lower salaries. Also, again due to gendered upbringing, women are less likely to assert their rights or claim raises or more favourable working conditions. This could therefore contribute to the suboptimal working conditions described through the data collected.

## Labour rights and unionisation

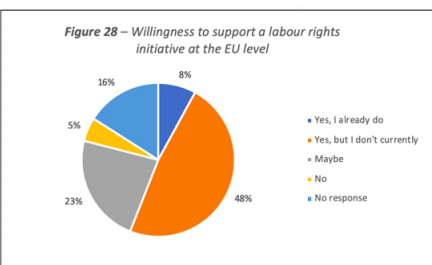
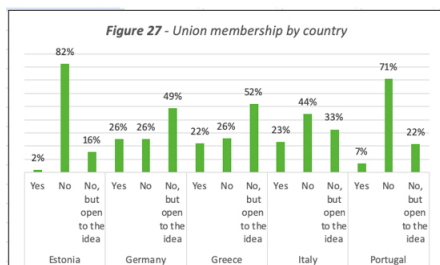
Figure 24 shows that the majority of those who responded are unaware of labour rights initiatives at the EU level for workers in the civil society sector. In Figure 25, a higher percentage say they are aware of unions at the national level (28%), although a greater percentage report not knowing (34%). It is not surprising, then, that membership in unions is low. Only 13% say they belong to a labour union. 26% report that they are not currently, but are open to the idea, and a high percentage (44%) say no, without also indicating interest in the idea of joining one were it available.



In looking at union membership by country (only the five most common countries represented), there are several interesting observations. First, only 2% of Estonians reported membership in a union. Of those that report being a member in a union, only 2% are in Estonia. Estonia is also the least likely to say they are open to the idea. Italy has the highest percentage who do belong to a union, followed closely by Germany and Greece. This data should be interpreted carefully, as it is not representative, but perhaps it indicates cultural or historical tendencies by country.

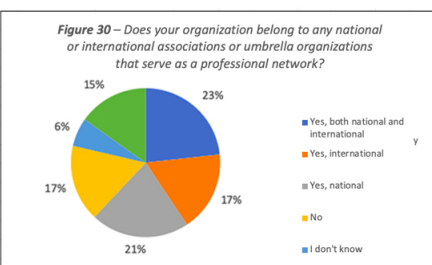
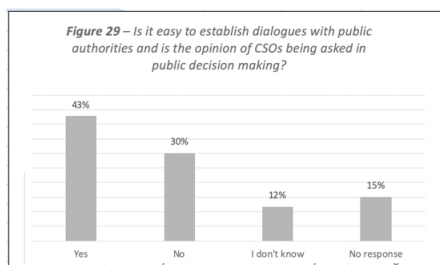
When asked more explicitly, however, whether they would be willing to support a labour rights initiative at the EU level (Figure 28), 56% say that they are supportive of the idea (8% of which already do). An additional 23% said they might be interested and only 5% responded that they would not be interested in such an effort, indicating that there is reason to believe such an initiative would be well-received.





## Dialogue with public authorities and networks

As Figure 29 shows, 43% of respondents state it is easy for their organisation to be in dialogue with public authorities and that their opinion is considered in public decision-making. 30%, on the other hand, say it is not easy and 12% reported they did not know. This presents an opportunity for future research to identify which types of organisations see themselves as more easily able to influence dialogue with public authorities, and which kinds of public entities (local, regional, national) they are referencing. Comparing the situations in different countries would also give useful insights as to how to promote horizontal exchanges among organisations at the EU level.

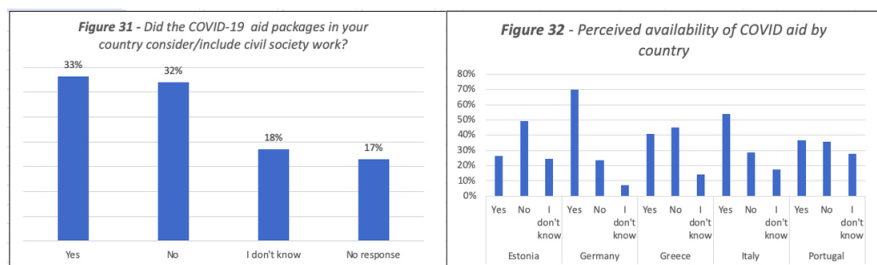


A high number of respondents are engaged in some level of networks, whether international, national or both – 61% in total (Figure 30). 23% are engaged in both international and national, 17% in just international networks and 21% in just national. Again, this data may be skewed by the fact that respondents who took part in the survey are likely to be in-

volved in networks through which they heard about the survey. Further research should explore which subcategories of CS sectors have stronger networks at each level, or if there are differences in the prevalence of these kinds of networks based on national context.

## Impact of COVID-19


Although the project was developed prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the survey was not finalized until afterwards. As such, it was possible to include a related question. Figure 31 reports the distribution of respondents who reported that the COVID-19 aid packages in their countries included their field of work. As we know, government approaches to the crisis and its financial ramifications varied greatly across Europe. Correspondingly, the impact on civil society organizations and individuals also varied, as confirmed here, where the percentage of people who said ‘yes’ (33%) is just 1 percentage point higher than those who said ‘no’ (32%). Although we cannot derive a full picture of the treatment of the civil society sector during the COVID-19 pandemic based on this one question, it gives a small degree of insight into the divergent experiences of individuals, organizations and sectors across Europe and beyond.



Breaking this down by country, as seen in Figure 32, we see that in Germany and Italy, the majority said the aid did cover their sector, whereas in Greece and Estonia, a majority said that it did not cover their sector, either indicating the aid was not as widely available, or only available in certain subsectors, or that respondents were unaware of the status and availability of aid packages.

**The COVID 19 outbreak and lockdown policies have brought to light some significant elements regarding policies related to the civil society sector and its recognition.** On the one hand, SCOs have played an





important role in supporting vulnerable groups - or those who have become vulnerable as a result of the pandemic - by providing a timely response to the ongoing emergency. In some cases, they have ensured access to essential goods and services, replacing a void in public institutions. This role has been recognized primarily in rhetorical form, transforming civil society actors into “heroes” or angels”, recognizing the value and ethical dimension. However, often without a concrete response in terms of resources. Once again, it seems to be a lack of ability or willingness to recognize what civil society has produced or is producing. The same can be said for those sectors of civil society that have had to slow down, modify or decrease their activities – e.g. organisations in non-formal education and youth work. As mentioned earlier, since a large part of CSOs’ funding is based on their activities, this has also resulted in a reduction in their budgets. Not all organizations have been able to sustain themselves through those budget cuts -especially the smaller ones -having to reduce the staff employed or even consider closing the organization itself.

Lockdown policies and the massive introduction of smart working have had an important impact on working conditions, which can be considered partly positive - thanks to the streamlining of certain processes, especially for those operating internationally - and partly negative - linked to the new organization of work and the reconciliation with private life, family organization with children and the lack of space to have a dedicated space for work activities.

Finally, the failure to fully recognize the role of civil society was also seen in the process of building post-emergency policies - recovery and resilience plans - in which CSOs were ignored or included in the discussion only at the margins. Although it has been and is the sector that has the most expertise in rethinking and transforming our communities and societies from a shared care perspective, CSOs have not played as crucial a role in thinking about recovery as, for example, the private sector - of industry and services - has. In this direction, therefore, the need to continue the process of advocacy towards public institutions - at national and European level - for a full recognition of the role of civil society for the welfare of society and the recognition of the professionalism



and rights of workers operating in this sector is once again underlined.

### **3.4. Analysis and conclusion**


It is not possible to identify a common understanding of the concept of civil society. This concept, in fact, refers to a very wide variety of occupational sectors or fields - e.g. social, cultural, educational, human rights, sport; types of organisations - for example in terms of purpose, size, legal nature, etc.; and professionals working in it. The desire to contribute to the well-being of society, to fight for the rights of those in a vulnerable position, to demand a fairer society and to guarantee services and access to rights for all, are all elements that differentiate civil society in different local, national or regional contexts compared to other occupational sectors.

Emphasising the diversity that characterises “civil society” and the organisations that are part of it explains one of the limits that was difficult to overcome in our survey, which is that it cannot be representative of all this diversity at the European or even national level. At the same time, however, if taken as a whole, the data collected can provide us with some information that goes beyond specific sectors, types of organisation and types of profession, and therefore tells us something about the role of civil society in contemporary societies and about certain working conditions, which are transversal and widespread.

#### **Voluntary-based characteristic**

What distinguishes CSOs is the double component that animates them - on the one hand, voluntary activity, and on the other hand, work carried out by professionals. This dual role allows organisations to fulfil the different responsibilities mentioned above, which include a value-based, ideal dimension and a technical dimension of providing services and offering high quality initiatives. There are a multitude of nuances created by the mix of the two components - voluntary and professional. We see organisations and informal groups composed exclusively of volunteers/activists, but also very structured organisations, which provide public services. The purpose and composition of voluntary and professional activity therefore





gives rise to different organisational structures, in terms of legal formalisation and working culture.

Volunteering and professional work, as mentioned, are both fundamental and complementary components of CS in order to have a significant impact on social wellbeing and fulfil different functions: guaranteeing access to rights, acting as advocates for public institutions to ensure that those rights are guaranteed to all and that civil society does not replace the institutions themselves.

Finally, it should be added that in some cases we talk about professional volunteering, i.e., professionals - pro bono lawyers, pro bono communicators - who devote part of their time and competences to CSOs. This is a sought-after and very useful asset, but one that goes beyond the organisational structure in the strict sense. This mechanism may have positive effects on the quality of services provided and savings for organisations, but at the same time, it may have negative effects because it seems to reaffirm a lack of professionalism in the CS sector.

### ***Working conditions in CS work sector***

Workers in the CS sector often experience simultaneously challenging and motivating conditions within their work context. What makes this work challenging are the precarious or discontinuous contractual conditions of jobs in this sector and access to types of contracts that do not have full protection: e.g., in terms of economic recognition; social security; pension payments; access to parental leave or sickness protection - conditions that strongly influence a person's life beyond their role as a worker. At the same time, these jobs nurture and stimulate the worker who often shares the ethical and value dimension pursued by the organisations working in this field. This is something that can be considered positive both from the point of view of the worker and the organisation. But, at the same time, if and when the motivational lever takes over, this can lead to self-exploitation, burnout, and negative impacts on mental health and for work-life balance more generally.

Another aspect that makes working conditions difficult concerns the funding model of organisations: the economic and human resources


available to them. Organisations are often understaffed, which means that those who work have to take on more tasks which correspond to their working time. Workers in CSOs are often strongly committed to the purpose of the organisation and believe their work can contribute to the society so they dedicate more time than the regular work schedule even if organisations cannot afford to pay extra working time.

Moreover, since most funding is linked to winning projects or contracts, the staff of CSOs in addition to implementing activities are simultaneously engaged in developing new projects in order to be able to provide continuity of funding to the organisation, and thus to “their” employment contract.

## **CSOs funding system**

Working conditions of those who work in CSOs are often precarious and lack various economic recognition and various benefits that are instead more guaranteed in the public and private sectors. These conditions, as mentioned, are in part due to a general worsening of the employment conditions of younger generations of workers. On the other hand, however, they are determined by the specific features that characterize the civil society sector and the non-profit organizations that operate within it. In most cases, these are organizations that obtain funding through calls for proposals or contracts from public institutions (local, national, or European) through the presentation of projects or bids for the provision of services. Project-based public funding entails some negative consequences in organizational terms, giving rise to what some social scientists call **“The non-profit starvation cycle”**: this type of funding recognizes the economic and human resources for carrying out activities but does not take into account the structural costs that organizations have for the very existence and work carried out beyond the individual activities funded, which are equally essential for the performance of the work and the continuity of the organizations’ work. Donors (public, but also private foundations) therefore have unrealistic expectations that are pandered to by the non-profit organizations themselves in order to obtain funding. This generates a vicious cycle because by not adapting to this mode of funding, the unrealistic expectations are confirmed. Breaking this vi-





cious circle is the only way to give respite to CSOs, fully recognize the work they do, and ensure the impact and quality of their work. The funding system generates organizational conditions that force organizations to behave ambiguously with respect to what they intend to pursue and how they can work. For example, organizations are often understaffed and require workers to work more hours than they are paid; taking advantage of precarious contracts, internships and volunteer and civil service for positions that relate to structural functioning.

In addition, the current funding system generates forms of competition for resources rather than dynamics of collaboration and cooperation among CSOs, and this has negative consequences in terms of the goals and impact that CSOs achieve and could achieve. Fostering coordination and collaboration, in fact, could create systems that would not only allow for high quality activities and services, but enhance the social capital generated by CSOs for society and democracy.

It would be important for CSOs to have access to a funding system capable of supporting the entire organization in the goals it pursues and not just individual activities on a project basis. This could guarantee greater flexibility in the management of funds, favouring greater stability of the organizations themselves, the possibility of having a long-term strategy, as well as the creative capacity to give appropriate and timely responses to the needs of a society in continuous transformation.

## **Professionalisation and the future of the sector**

Increased professionalization and its full recognition are phenomena that would bring numerous benefits to CSOs and its workers. Recognizing the professionalism needed to carry out the activities and services included in the civil society sector could lead to a recognition and improvement in working conditions. This would activate a virtuous circuit and could bring better performance and quality of work performed. Since the objectives of CSOs have the common good of communities and the improvement of the quality of life of its vulnerable groups as their goals, there would be a positive impact on society as a whole with greater social cohesion and strengthening of democratic processes.

Greater professionalization is not an optional element that would bring many benefits, but a necessary element to contribute in a concrete and effective way in an increasingly articulated and complex system. A system that requires civil society organizations to be able to operate in a global perspective and therefore to confront not only the local reality, but also on a national and European level. Operating at an international level and in relation to European institutions requires greater professionalization, for example, in terms of communication, advocacy and networking.


Greater professionalization and its formal recognition by public institutions could lead to greater specification of functions and tasks within individual organizations and thus lead, as mentioned earlier, to improved performance. Recognizing the need for different professional skills for the good functioning of CSOs would also have an impact on the training offered by universities, which could have specific courses for the insertion of highly qualified figures in the civil society sector. A process that has already been underway for some years, but still not fully developed; in many cases, in fact, specific training remains in the non-formal sector. This implies an effective professionalization of those who work in the sector, but a lack of formal and institutional recognition that could instead have an impact in terms of workers' rights.

Looking to the future, the development of regulatory frameworks for labour rights in the civil society sector could foster greater protection for workers, but at the same time it could put a strain on smaller organizations where the professional and voluntary components are not completely distinct and the organizational structure not highly developed. This would lead to a loss for civil society and democratic participation.

## Conclusion

As evidenced by our research within the scope of the *Unsung Heroes Dialogues* project, the civil society sector in Europe spans a broad number of professions and fields, faces unique and divergent challenges, and is made up of a diverse workforce. There is no one definition of what it means to be a civil society worker, and the profes-





sional experiences vary greatly from country to country, organization to organization and individual to individual. This survey of civil society workers and the corresponding qualitative interviews with experts and practitioners in the field seeks to offer some insight into the working experiences of those in this sector, an under-researched and little understood question. Without aiming to be representative, in analyzing the 534 responses from at least 30 countries, we gain some important insights and shore up some common assumptions.

Of course, this analysis is just a first attempt, and much more research must be conducted. Several opportunities for future research have been identified in the course of this analysis related specifically to needs for future data collection:

◆ **First**, this survey indicated that those who are in project-based contracts are more likely to feel insecure in their professional positions. This confirms what we may expect about longer-term positions being more conducive to a sense of job security. However, in this survey, a high number of respondents selected “other” in reporting whether their position was project-based or not, so it would be interesting in the future to see what types of positions civil society workers find themselves in in terms of the funding of their positions. Perhaps, for example, we may find that many positions are funded by both longer-term assets and short-term project-based funds.

◆ **Secondly**, when asked in this survey about whether respondents’ occupations were officially recognized (Figure 20), 43% affirmed that it was and 16% said they didn’t know. Given that professional recognition of certain occupations varies by country, it would be interesting to investigate this question in combination with data on profession and by country.

◆ **Third**, we make the assumption in this survey that participation in professional development opportunities is


*related to the degree of professionalisation. To confirm this relationship, though, we would need to conduct further research into the types of professional development offered, who is conducting these, whether they are associated with official certifications or licensure, etc. Certainly, this is not the only factor evidencing professionalization of a field, so a more full survey around this specific topic would be of value, including other variables. It would also be useful to understand who has access based on individual and position-based characteristics (e.g., those that have permanent contracts, the level of the contract type, specific profession, etc.).*

◆ **Lastly**, this survey was open to a very broad audience of workers in the civil society sector. As a result, we understand that it may include responses from those in highly diverse subsectors, i.e., labour and trade unions, schools and universities, advocacy groups, professional associations, religious institutions, cultural institutions, youth workers and non-formal education, etc. Further research should explore these subcategories more specifically, to find out if the results presented here are consistent across sub-sector or if these are unique across. Understanding the unique needs and conditions of each sub-sector is essential for better advocating for worker's rights on behalf of civil society as a whole.

Of course, this analysis has also raised many more questions, which should be considered in discussions around this topic moving forward, for example:

- ◆ *Who is the sector comprised of? Does the prevalence of women or young people contribute to a culture of self-exploitation of CSO workers?*
- ◆ *Do managerial and administrative classes exist within*





*NGOs, and do organisations where these classes are separate see worse working conditions?*

◆ *Has having most CSOs operating primarily on state funding led to an emphasis on services and de-emphasized advocacy work? How do funding mechanisms infringe on civil society's role as a political actor - in terms of advocating for its mission and for its role as a professionalised sector?*

◆ *Does the glorification of volunteering compromise the effectiveness of the sector and create damaging expectations of self-sacrifice?*

◆ *How connected are Brussels-based and national CSOs to the reality of local CSOs? Is this a barrier to advocacy? What mechanisms may be introduced to lessen this gap?*

Bringing these questions to the forefront of future conversations related to the professional rights of civil society organisations and their workers is essential for the wellbeing of individuals working the CS sector and for the sector itself.





# /04

Project  
Products

## 4.4. *The Autumn School*

### *"Civic engagement in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic"*

The Autumn School took place at the end of October – beginning of November 2020. Due to the pandemic and local restrictions, the program was adapted and implemented in the form of hybrid events. With that, we managed to gather 30 people for a physical meeting, and up to 12 people in total for an online group, which was running in parallel. A week before the start the local municipality tightened the restrictions, which forced us to split the group into two groups of 15 people, which was the maximum allowed to be placed



in one seminar room. Therefore, the sessions initially planned by the trainers had to run twice with double the workload and effort for the hosts. As a result, from the beginning of the event we had 3 groups of participants, following the same flow of the program, although having separate group dynamics. One of the trainers was fully dedicated to an



online group, which allowed us to keep the participants maximum involved, focused and productive. All three groups were connected via Zoom and could interact through broadcasting, live streaming, presenting the results of their work to each other and by using online tools like Miro, GSuite, and others.



The first three days focused on strengthening and sharing participants' conceptual understanding of civil society work, while the second half of the program focused on group work on campaigns and lobbying strategies. Following arrivals and first introductions to the project and each other, the partici-

pants were introduced to the Autumn School program in detail, and the preliminary results of UHD's survey to give broader context to the Autumn School. This was followed by sessions on the Coordination of Civil Society and on Regional/National Differences in Regulating Civil Society.

Day Two started with an exploration of Labour Rights and Unions for and in Civil Society, followed by sessions on Communication Strategies for NGOs – 'How to Create effective campaigns', introductions to lobbying, and on creating sustainable networks over the course of this day, the participants had the opportunity to engage with two experts on lobbying and sustainable networks – Pegah Moulana and Georg Pirker.



On Day Three, there was a Mid Term evaluation before participants were split into groups for their group projects which would last for the rest of the activity. The three groups each focused on Lobbying, Campaigning, or Online Campaigning. Throughout day three, four and five, they were supported to develop action plans and concepts for their campaigns/lobbying ideas.

Before the Autumn School ended, the groups met once more to share, give feedback and improve their creations before the Final Evaluation and officially Closing.

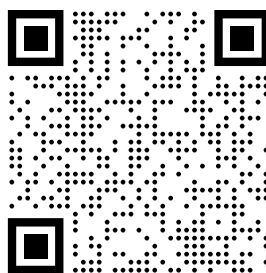


## **4.5. Campaigns**

The offline-based Campaign Group formed the campaign: “Let’s sing about unsung heroes” which aims to raise awareness of the value of civil society workers, and has the objective of creating a network and union of civil society workers starting in January 2021.

The online-based Campaign Group undertook research on the makeup of the civil society sector, focusing on: principles for hiring Civil Society Workers; the role of volunteers and employees; the power dynamics in the sector; and the barriers of access to the sector. In response, they formed a set of principles for equitable hiring processes. These were formulated into a pledge which NGOs can sign to signal their support of transparent and fair hiring processes in NGOs.

To know more, follow the QR code



## **4.6. Policy paper**

The Lobbying Group undertook research on the working situation of Civil Society Workers, exploring the need to create quality control mechanisms for employment conditions in civil society organizations; how to ensure sustainable networks are being built by civil society organisations; the research already undertaken on unions at the European level; as well as developed concrete recommendations for NGOs to lobby for and implement safeguards for civil society workers.

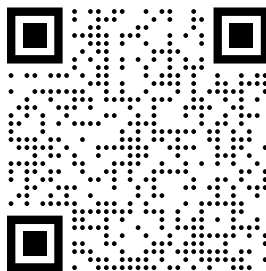
Although the importance of CSOs in strengthening democracy and representation on both the national and international levels is a well established fact, civil society workers continue to face issues in professionalization and recognition. These issues transcend different spheres, namely the political, economic, and social spheres.

***The policy paper aims to discuss the struggles that workers in the sector face and to propose recommendations to address them.***

The lack of professionalization leads to difficulty in the conceptualization of the sector which is connected to other struggles such as: inadequate resources, limited access to funding, lack of specialization, unpaid workforce that is linked to job insecurity. The lack of political and social recognition affects their safety, especially in a world afflicted with diverging political interests. After identifying these struggles, the group gathered several recommendations addressed to the Unsung Heroes Dialogues project, to the internal level of civil society, and to the European Union level.

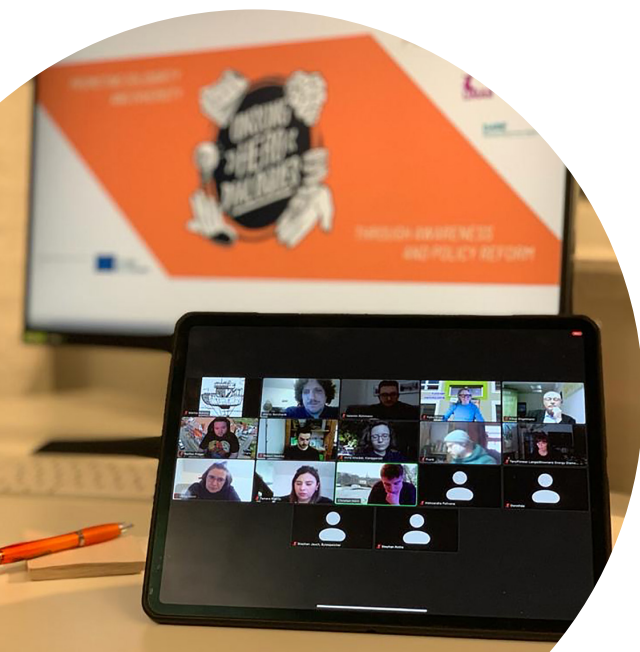
Further, they discussed the logistics and practicalities of lobbying for policy reforms with various stakeholders and have produced a white paper on the professionalisation of the civil society sector, which was a strong advocacy tool throughout the rest of the UHD project and will go beyond.

To know more, follow the QR code



# /05

*Local  
events*



## **5.1. *Raising awareness and policy meetings***

During the first two quarters of 2021 each partner organized 4 local meetings of local civil society activists. Each meeting included various audiences, gathering more than 10 participants. These events served as a platform for networking, sharing and discussion of economic/administrational issues and challenges in CS activists' work.

Additionally, between January 2021 and July 2021, each partner organized three one-day events that brought discussions on different aspects of the value of civic education, NGOs and those who work in them. These events were organized in forms of a seminar, forums, open discussions, etc. Each partner did a huge amount of work to cooperate with their local network to organize online and offline events that reached both the local public in general, youngsters and stakeholders about the issues of the project. Since DARE Network, a Belgium partner, was responsible for the survey and analysing the results, they were not conducting local events.

## **5.2. *Germany***

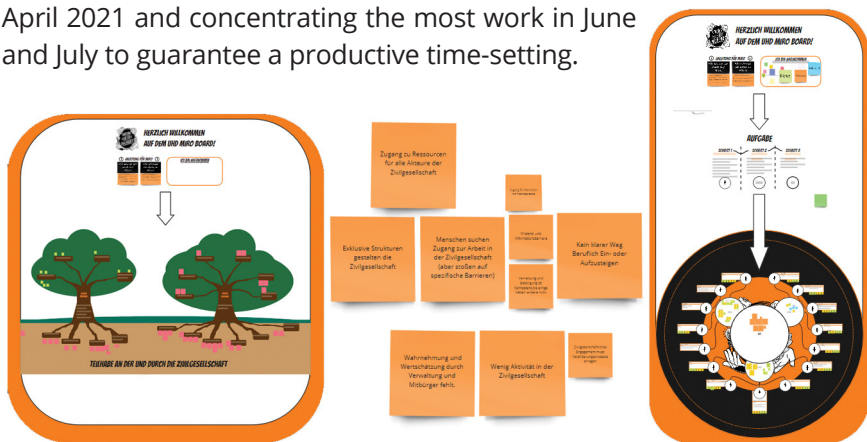
In the context of the "The Unsung Hero Dialogues – Promoting Solidarity and Diversity through Awareness and Policy Reform" the NGO Culture Goes Europe, further on labelled as CGE, successfully organized a group of different local events. The aim was to spread awareness of the situation of civil-society-workers within different parts of society and also to develop political suggestions with local experts for a change in the Thuringian civil-society. Since CGE is an organization working on international level with many partners in different countries, it was a refreshing experience to work with regional and local actors of civil society. The team was able to learn a lot about their perspectives and widened our view together with a team of local experts.

Since the organisation tried to tackle the recently described two different aims in the local part of the UHD-project, it made sense also to





establish two different kinds of events with different settings and partly different audiences. So, a plan that included two outreach- and awareness-events as well as at least four meetings with a local group of experts for the development of political suggestions was created. These events took place within a timeframe of four months, beginning at the end of April 2021 and concentrating the most work in June and July to guarantee a productive time-setting.



The local work kicked-off with an outreach and awareness event and the aim to stimulate a discussion between different individuals working in the civil society. People were invited to an open call to participate in a digital panel discussion with one moderator from the team and four panellists. A head of a school took part in this discussion as well as a head of a social enterprise, a member of a socio-cultural association and the head of an association for young people involved in urban gardening. These panellists in front of nearly 20 people discussed different topics, but since the audience had the opportunity to ask questions and give input themselves, the whole thing grew into a discussion of all people within the meeting. This discussion circled around funding programs, the distribution of money and decisional power, the measurements of work in civil society and the role of schools in the implementation and development of civil society within young people. That event was also a form of a kick-off for the next phase of local events: working with local experts on suggestions for political change.

For this, CGE has invited the participants of the first outreach and awareness event as well as other people within the Thuringian civil society. They prepared a future lab with four different parts, taking place



on four dates with two weeks between each meeting. The first two sessions took place in the framework of analysing structural problems of the Thuringian civil society and the roots of these problems. Working on that, the team started the first meeting after a short introduction about the project and a team building activity with the conception of different personas. Here, every participant created an individual person of a fictional character working in civil society, connected with special aims, conditions and difficulties. It is very likely that the participants included their own perspectives and experiences in these characters, so this technique took place to support the reflection process. Later working in groups, the participants had to look for similarities and differences between these personas as well as create a common framing of problems. At last, they came together as one to create a framing above all named topics. These gave the start of the next meeting, where they discussed the roots of the problems in a so-called “problem tree”. They worked in smaller groups again and connected these problems with their own roots and the following consequences. In the aftermath of the second session, they were able to adapt these problem trees



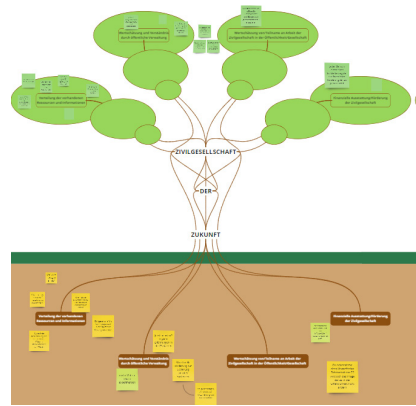
into a flow chart of underlying and following problems and consequences of civil society.

In the third expert meetings the team started the solution development process by abstracting general fields of action from these structures and providing them to the

participants again in the form of trees. Again, the experts had to work in trees with the big difference that now they thought of an ideal future where this problem is solved and the reasons why and how it has been solved. While working on this, they created first ideas for solutions and in that way a form of political suggestions that were discussed openly in the end and again regrouped into six different topics for the last event. In this, they created concrete political



suggestions by using the ideas from the last meeting and specified them while answering certain questions in a given form. In the end the team had 16 political suggestions in total, that were formulated into sentences and presented to the experts in a digital formular. They were asked for feedback to develop the suggestions further and to give a voting on how important they think certain suggestions are.



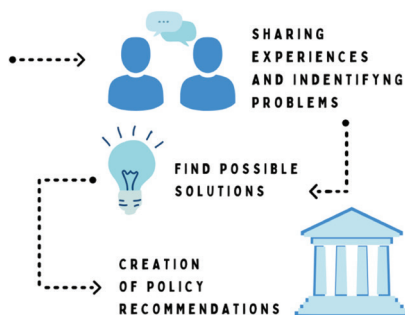
This presentation of the findings was the last part of the outreach and awareness events. Since CGE started these local projects in April, they created another open format in July 2021 at the CGE festival: engagement land. Here, they opened a panel discussion between three young people from different backgrounds working in or with civil society organizations. They talked about the different settings in which civil society takes place in their home countries and what that means for the work of auteurs in civil society. For example, there is big difference between the processes and directions of civil society development between Germany and India. But on the other hand, we also have things in common like fundamental values and beliefs that are the foundation of future cooperation.

### 5.3. *Italy*

La Fenice is a youth association that has its roots in Tortona (Italy), a small city where more than 70 civil society organizations are based. Besides being quite numerous and active, Tortona's Civil Society appears disjointed, hardly professionalized, and lacking a strong CS network. As a result, events such as the Covid-19 pandemic can easily jeopardize the efforts of the local CS. While organizing the policy events, La Fenice quickly understood that most of the local CSOs did not think of themselves as part of the CS or of a sector with common values and challeng-

es, therefore it was hard for some of them to identify with the project's target and aims. Accordingly, Policy events have been organized as on-line informal roundtables that usually started from sharing our personal experience as an association based in Tortona, and in this case it was usually easy for the participants to connect with the project thanks to the local common experience.

After identifying the obstacles, we tried to move on to what could improve CS' workers/volunteers' lives and, when possible, to formulate policy recommendations. The roundtables were not only meant to collect proposals at the local level, but to also bring out different sensibilities and interests, to meet new realities, and to share relevant contacts for the project. The different expertise and interests in specific parts of the project (regarding political participation, networking, communication strategy, etc.), led to a small local network of civil society organizations interested in further participating in the project activities and future steps.



**Awareness raising** events took place in different locations that were connected to the local CS scene. The first event was a presentation of the project with a focus on the survey and the importance of collecting data for the project purpose. Two other awareness raising events were made using the "banquet" format, which gave us the opportunity to reach a much wider audience, including people not directly involved in the CS. Through a board game created specifically for the project and inspired by the "Take a step forward" role game by the Compass manual the audience had the chance



Through a board game created specifically for the project and inspired by the "Take a step forward" role game by the Compass manual the audience had the chance

to impersonate a CS worker. The game's aim was to help the audience understand how difficult it can be to join the CS' work sector without financial and social privileges, and without leaving it eventually for a more stable job.

## ***Results from the policy events***

Two of the four political meetings that took place involved volunteers, representatives of the CS organizations, and CS workers from Tortona and the surroundings. Labour organizations and political representatives were invited as well, but most of them didn't respond to our invitations or stated that they were not prepared on the topic. The absence of representatives at the union level will be one of the recurring themes at the policy events' discussion.

Most of the problems reported in the roundtables were related to the lack of opportunities (especially funding and training) for small size CSOs. A specific focus was on youth organizations, since their collaboration with more "mature" or established CSOs has been identified as one of the possible solutions to the lack of innovation in the local CS. Several proposals regarding the validation of the volunteering skills

at the national level were presented too because the already existing ones were not considered effective enough and well-known by the CS. The topic of the validation of the volunteering skills was also connected to several discussions regarding possible approaches to communicate to the external public



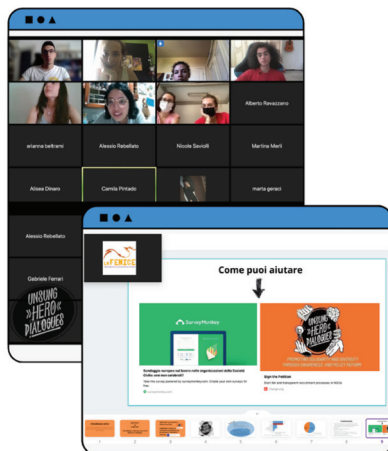
the value of volunteering, and drastically change the toxic rhetoric that surrounds volunteering (such as the "everyone could do it"). During the meetings it has been pointed out that the communication strategy regarding volunteering needs to avoid forms of self-celebration and white savior degeneration. The other two political meetings that took place involved volunteers working in the Universal Civic Service (SCU). The SCU consists of a one-year work contract for people between the ages of 18 and 28. Such projects usually enable young people to work with

public entities and CSOs. The SCU represents one of the few opportunities for young people in Italy to be paid as workers in the CS sector while also being trained. Despite the Universal Civil Service being an effective and established policy, during the meetings some suggestions were made to make it more inclusive and attentive to the rights of its workers. The suggestions mainly focused on having:

◆ *More investments in the SCU projects so that more young people could have access to this opportunity, and thus tackling the recurring youth employment and NEET conditions.*

◆ *A minimum compensation for the management/training work undertaken by the organizations affiliated with the SCU.*

◆ *More representation in the SCU National Council.*



In conclusion, during the political meetings, it has been recognized a general lack of political representation (absence of labour organization and inefficiency of the institutions that should be responsible for the promotion of support measures and empowerment of the CS).

It has been suggested in the proposal to develop a strategic communication plan to effectively communicate the value of the CS/CSOs and to co-fund training opportunities to bolster the effectiveness and expertise of the local CS in a collaborative perspective.

## 5.4. Portugal

The theme of the UHD project is not new for UMAR, since this organisation has been involved in its creation in 2018. Besides, civil society work is a feminist issue, since it is mostly done (paid work or voluntary work) by women. In addition, through activism, advocacy and projects, our



organisation has always defended equal labour rights.

Since the beginning of the “Unsung Hero Dialogues”, UMAR has been developing the different guidelines and frameworks of the project itself and, from Spring 2021, as long as we were disseminating and collecting the latest answers to the new UHD Survey, we were exploring, listing, and inviting the most suitable Civil Society Organisations (CSO) - with differentiated statutes, areas of action and focus - for later possibly hosting awareness –raising and/or policy-centered events with some of its members.

By applying different methodologies those events were a tool to help determine and analyze several aspects and the current situation of Portuguese CSO. The surveys formulated in 2018 and 2020 are also a positive milestone to help this

understanding, highlighted by the fact that UMAR as a partner and the overall project’ consortium have over-passed the expected number of answers.



The events, that UMAR has organized, have covered not only the current situation of civil society in general, but

also with focus on topics that intersect with gender, class, and activism. The sessions have been accompanied by presentations about the UHD project, the 2018 questionnaire results, statistical information on gender and labour precarity in Portugal, the characterization of the Portuguese civil society, as well as the results that have been gradually collected from the previous sessions. Each event had a question as a title, moving from a more general standpoint to the recommendations phase. Throughout the scope of the events in the coordination with Aselafem - Asociación de Estudos Laborais Feministas (in English, Feminist Labour Studies Association) and Faísca Voadora, the organization has covered such topics and questions as:



- ◆ *Gender, Precarity and (the challenges of) Civil Society Work in Portugal*
- ◆ *Work Precarity in the 3rd sector. Where are We and Where are We Going?*
- ◆ *Working Conditions in Civil Society Organisations*




After the first events took off, the next event “Feminist Perspectives on Civil Society Work” tried to discuss the Civil Society Work from a Gendered lenses. Important testimonies and thoughts came out of there, reminding that although this is a widely feminized job area,

there is still gender (and queer) based discrimination, with shared reflections on the wider challenges women face to be equally and/or better regarded, paid and recognized. The next day morning it was re-started the session “Work in Civil Society Organisations. Where are We?” with workers from of other entities, namely cooperatives.



Throughout the scope of the events, the organization has counted 73 participants – workers and trainees from 16 CSO, plus freelancers and individual inscriptions (researchers, lawyers, social educators). Those CSO where statutorily differentiated: NGOs, Social Solidarity Private Institutions and Cooperatives – of various aims: Anti-Racism; Arts and Culture; Cooperation and Development; Education/HRE; Fair Trade; Gender Equality/Feminism; Health/Harm Reduction; Labour Rights; LGBTQI+; Youth.





Looking now at the overall results collected from all the events organized by UMAR, it is possible to perceive a consensus of affirmations, critiques, and observations of the current situation of the Portuguese civil society. Entitled as “Work in organizations of the civil society”, UMAR’s mind-map has provided a visual overview of the connecting aspects, critical of the reality lived in Portugal, and influential as to facilitate a space for reflection and discussion. By taking into consideration the outcome of the sessions, 6 main realms of influence and action have been pinpointed, namely:

- 1 *Economic and financial level***
- 2 *Political level***
- 3 *European level***
- 4 *Level of working conditions***
- 5 *Waged labor vs. voluntary work***
- 6 *Level of NGOs roles and functions***

## ***Economic and financial level***

A central topic was that of the economic management and the financial investments that sustain an NGO and circulate inside its bureaucratic structures. Major critiques have been made to the ways that NGO receive the necessary monetary resources, to concretize their contrasting functions and projects. In the context of Portugal, critiques revolved around the financing: that there are too many bureaucratic limitations that affect the fluidity and pace of the projects’ activities, that the available fiscal resources do not satisfy the necessities of the workers. To answer in part these matters, it urged other more sustainable forms of financing that meet the needs and necessities of the NGOs and their workers.

## ***Political level***

Jumping from the economic to the political, this latter realm may be equally considered of having an uttermost importance to how NGOs and their workers perform their distinct roles and functions. Here, critiques and observations are also unanimous, as it is undeniable the enabling character of politics in the concretization of NGO. Hence, the major critiques tackle the lack of political representation of NGOs, their workers, and their needs within the State. A missing space is not only visible within the structures of the government, but also in the eyes of all members of



society, as there is a lack of recognition of NGOs work, action, and importance in the civil society. Furthermore, the dependency and vulnerability of NGOs on the government, especially in politically transitioning periods, like elections periods.

## ***European level***

The European Union plays an essential role in promoting and financing various components that European NGOs take advantage from for their different functions and structures. Most of the observations made with regards to the EU are directed towards the lack of attention and lobbying that is given inside the European Commission. On one hand, there is a general sense that the provision of funds and financial resources are attributed in a direct yet indifferent manner. A direct link may be established when workers of civil society feel that there is no sufficient lobbying. Another aspect is that of the absence of statistical data and categorization of organizations of civil society that can be related at both the European level but also nationally, allowing unified and transnational guidelines and frameworks for developments to be applied equally among member-states.

## ***Level of working conditions***

The topic of the working conditions and the environment in which workers are inserted are an unavoidable matter. Intimately connected with the economic and financial scopes, much attention has been given to the actual conditions that negatively impact the lives of civil society workers. Once again, unanimous agreement was given to the absence of support and that of material resources. Adding to this, critiques equally revolve around the insufficient professional training and enrichment of the workers. These aspects relate to the stagnant sensation of technicians as professionals, as they are not provided with new tools and knowledge to enhance their activities and functions and provide a better service. Relating to ways of maintaining activity in the NGOs, it was mentioned the dependency of NGOs to develop and start new projects, which relates to their unsustainable financial approach. Further commentaries touch upon the low wages. All these aspects account for the general lack of labor stability and security, the underlying causes for the discontentment for workers of the civil society.

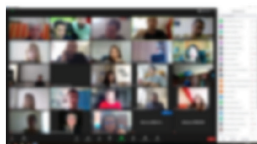


## 5.5. Greece

Under the project *THE UNSUNG HERO DIALOGUES – PROMOTING SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY THROUGH AWARENESS AND POLICY REFORM*, United Societies of Balkans has implemented different events in the local community, for identifying the issues and obstacles that the civil society is facing and the youth of Thessaloniki as well.

The key objectives of the events were to create a meeting space between the local NGOs and people engaged in the civil society and fostering the collaboration for creating policy recommendations and solving different problems that the local society and community is struggling with. Simultaneously, public events for raising the awareness of the general public and local communities, giving them the opportunity to raise their voice, share their opinion and examine all the problems that they are facing.

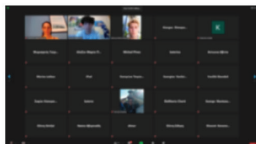
### Local events with Civil Society organisations and the general public



#### 4 EVENTS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

##### Online meetings

The meetings with the local organisations of Thessaloniki were made online from November 2020 to April 2021. The main topics of discussion were the active participation of the youth in civil society and volunteerism.



#### 1 EVENT WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

##### Online meeting

One online meeting with the youth of Thessaloniki, in March 2021. During the event, participants discussed the problems of the local community and possible solutions.



#### 2 EVENTS WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

##### Offline meetings

After the lockdown, 2 offline meetings with the youth of Thessaloniki were organised in May and July 2021. The participants were introduced to the topic and have created results based on NFL activities.

For the local events with the civil society actors, online methods were used, taking into consideration the COVID-19 restrictions and that the discussion between the local NGOs and public authorities would be easily facilitated online. In these events, staff members of local NGOs and actors of the civil society were participating, as well as public authorities and people working in the municipality of Thessaloniki and smaller towns around the city.

Regarding the public awareness events, the first one was made online while the other 2 offline. During the online meeting, the participants had the opportunity to discuss about



the future of the youth in a city which is facing different problems while the main point of discussion was the environment and how the city can be eco-friendlier and greener. The offline events were based in non-formal education activities, starting from name games and ice-breakers to different activities and exercises which brought a deeper discussion to the topic. The main methods and activities that were used are theatre of the oppressed and exercises such as What does my community look like.

The main focus of discussion in both events. With the civil society and the general public, were focused on:

- ◆ *The improvement Thessaloniki*
- ◆ *The lack of youth presence and participation in outdoors activities*
- ◆ *Social issues such as the environmental pollution and the inequalities between different neighborhoods of the city and smaller towns*

During the beginning of each event, the main question to the participants was “Do you think the society you are living need any change?” and most of them answered positively, while some of them have raised questions as answers such as, if not, then why are we here? During the theatre of the oppressed, the participants had the opportunity to present the topic they had in very different and unique ways, while the audience which was asked to address the issue and try to solve it, was very highly motivated in participating, with the discussion being very long.



## 5.6. *Estonia*

In spring 2021 Estonia was due to the Covid-19 in lockdown. It heavily influenced the arrangement of the project's local events. Therefore, during the period foreseen in the Project calendar local events were possible to organize only online. The Jaan Tõnisson Institute used NGO society mailing lists, different Facebook accounts and direct invitations to call people to participate in the local events provided via ZOOM.

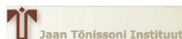
All the meetings - six on-line and one real were built up on the aims and goals, materials and findings of our project. The online events were divided into Policy events and Awareness raising events. Developed by the Project Team materials and provided in Estonia, an on-line questionnaire of the third sector members was used as the discussion platforms for the meetings.



Üleeuroopaline küsitlus  
töötamise kohta  
kodanikuühiskonna  
organisatsioonides

The Unsung Hero Dialogues - Promoting Solidarity  
and Diversity through Awareness and Policy Reform

Eesti valim  
2020



Altogether six Zoom events took place. In August it was possible to arrange one meeting dedicated to the issues of everyday practices of the Estonian third sector. The on-line meetings were by the number of participants not very numerous. Only the August 10 meeting collected 50 participants, which was the maximum size of a public event set by the government. The first on-line event took place in April. The participants of the meeting were educators and teachers, who discussed the issues concerning the influence and input of non-governmental organizations to the educational life of Estonia - especially in the conditions of the pandemic situation.

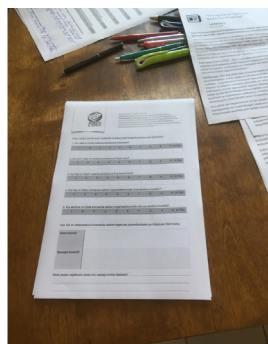
Two of the events that were planned as policy events remained in fact consultations. One of the participants - Head of the Volunteer Devel-



opment Center, after the informing about the project and Estonian questionnaire findings, raised the issues on cooperation between the third sector umbrella organizations and the member organizations. During this consultation meeting the issues of conditions for a small local initia-

tive group were handled. The importance of local cooperation between similar by profile NGO-s and support to them by the local government authorities were discussed.


The next awareness raising event for young people studying Civic Education and the role of civil society in democracy gathered 30 participants that were informed about European civil society, it's aims, goals and achievements. Estonian civil society issues were introduced and developed in parallel. Much was spoken about the Jaan Tõnisson Institute experiences – locally and internationally. The young generation was encouraged to become active members of European civil society.



About the Estonian civil society much was spoken about the genesis and historical achievements of it. Underlined was the fact that in Estonia exists good and supported by the legal basis of the country's civil society. More is required from the government in the field of material support (financing) to the NGO-s. Also the level of taking into account the proposals and initiatives from the side of the third sector could be better.



The last local meeting took place offline. The number of participants, 50, was the maximum allowed for public events by the government. The meeting contained a program introduction of the European proj-



ect, introduction of the Estonian survey results, presentation by the speakers about the practices and problems of the third sector organizations. During the event the participants were delivered written materials introducing the project. A summarizing questionnaire about the third sector situation in Estonia was provided to fulfil.

## **5.7. Romania**

The Intercultural Institute Timisoara is a non-governmental, autonomous and apolitical organisation from Romania, which promotes intercultural values, active citizenship and respect for human rights.

In the Unsung Hero Dialogues project over a few months we organised several meetings with the purpose to discuss with peers from other NGOs about our activity and possibilities of improvement in terms of public policies.

One of the meetings was dedicated to discussing with activism/umbrella NGOs and legislation specialists, on the need to change legislation regarding the interactions between the Romanian state and NGOs. The main problems identified were the following: difficulties in the management of the national registry of NGOs in Romania, which centralises information about the NGOs; excessive paperwork in the interaction between NGOs and the registry; difficult access to information regarding NGOs in the registry. The main solution proposed during the meeting was the digitalisation of the national registry of NGOs, even though the participants expressed some reserves towards the application of this solution, due to its large scope.

Another problem approached during this meeting was a relatively recent change in NGO legislation in Romania regarding the obligation of some NGOs to submit a declaration regarding the “real beneficiaries” of the organisation’s activities, where the term “real beneficiaries” is equivalent to the founding members, the current members of the association, the members of the board and the real representatives. The declaration is not to be submitted online. This legislation has been issued in



an effort to comply with the European Union's Anti-Money Laundering Directive but it is not an effective measure in the Romanian context. There are many NGOs which have strongly advocated for removing this policy and it was put on hold during the pandemic.

Another meeting in the framework of UHD project was organised with NGOs and other stakeholders from a disadvantaged area in Romania (Vulcan – Hunedoara county) and focused on the local policies regarding NGOs and their possibility to contribute to local development and to cooperate with local authorities.

Another meeting we organised gathered together NGOs focusing on supporting the education system in Romania. The Intercultural Institute Timisoara has been working in this field for decades. Our most lasting support program for teachers is called “Project Citizen” and it aims to support Education for Democratic Citizenship’ teachers to use a project based learning method through which students learn about public policies. We are interested in collaborating with other NGOs who have complementary programs for teachers, schools and other stakeholders in the educational system. During the meeting we shared our plans for next year and started to reflect on possible ideas for public policy changes needed to help our activities, such as a system




of community outreach of universities, which would allow university students to prepare better for becoming teachers, or systematically involve the civil society in school life, for the benefit of the whole community.

A small network of NGOs was thus established as a conclusion of this meeting, with the purpose of exchanging experience in working with the educational system on various levels and on various topics, as well as supporting each other in their educational and support programs.

Another meeting dedicated to the education field was a discussion with NGOs from several counties in Romania where we would like to pilot a civic education project supported by a network of volunteers. The dis-





cussions included ways in which through official policies of the education system (at national level and at county level) the contribution of NGOs in supporting schools for implementing various non-formal education activities, connected with the existing curriculum, can be recognised and supported by local authorities. This can be done considering also the new indicators and methodology for quality assurance in schools, which in principle offer such possibilities and are becoming the main reference for schools from the school year 2021-2022.

In continuation of the policy meetings, the awareness raising events organised in the project were focused on the role of NGOs in supporting the education system, as well as on the disseminating the message about the need to reduce the excessive paperwork in the activity of the NGOs and about a correct positioning of the financing entities towards the civil society – not beneficiaries, but project promoters.

Some conclusions which can be drawn after these meetings are that there is a consensus among a number of NGOs on the importance of the following elements:

- ◆ *The educational system should envisage cooperation mechanisms among NGOs and between NGOs and schools, in order to have an integrated support system of the civil society towards the education system, and the local authorities should recognize and support these mechanisms.*
- ◆ *The relation between NGOs and the state should be digitalized, and useless paperwork should be eliminated from the activity of NGOs.*
- ◆ *The terminology used by the EU and by national agencies managing EU and national funds should change, from calling NGOs “project beneficiaries”, to recognising them as “project promoters”; NGOs should not feel grateful for receiving non-refundable grants, but the society should understand that it is the duty of governments, of the EU, of businesses, to contribute to the well-being in society by supporting the work of NGOs.*





# /06

## Policy

## Recommendations



# ***Estonia***

## ***Proposed actions:***

### ***1 - Local Level***

- 1) Organisations of third sector should be more visible. Media should not reflect only politics, but also daily life and input of NGOs.
- 2) More cooperation between NGOs — especially on the field of Education and Culture.
- 3) NGOs should concentrate more on creating their own sources of income like rent of premises, paid trainings and courses.
- 4) There should be more project writing consultants around the country.

Often it is not allowed to include into the application budgets office costs and office supplies. This should also be considered on local, national, and European level.

### ***2 - National Level***

- 1) Preparing people to be a member of civil society should be a national strategy and planned throughout the life cycle.
- 2) Accounting voluntary work for pension purposes.
- 3) As a labor sector, Civil Society organisations need to be supported and motivated to engage more in social entrepreneurship, public and community services.
- 4) Many concrete tasks are delegated by the state to the NGOs, but the following funding is not adequate.
- 5) There are cases where the funding of NGOs by donors is not enough transparent.

### 3 - International/European Level

- 1) On the European level there are proposal writing platforms that have limited access and sophisticated by use. Smaller NGOs do not have capacity and knowledge to apply or even participate in such European projects.
- 2) The salary rates (day/per hour) in European projects for all categories involved (staff, trainers/teachers, administrative) in international projects should be equalised by the countries. By now the salary rates differ by countries up to four times.
- 3) Promoting work in civil society as a career - rather prestige is low and wages are low, largely due to lack of public support.
- 4) At EU level, countries need to be motivated to cooperate with and support NGOs.
- 5) European projects often have very limited items for spending. For example, NGOs are required to submit annual reports and the like for applications, but no money is provided for their preparation.



# Germany

## ***Results of the Local Policy Meetings for Thuringia/Germany***

### ***Proposed actions:***

#### ***1 - State-level program on Civic Activation***

The Thuringian state government develops and implements the state activation program, which is coordinated by the Thuringian State Chancellery. The starting point of the program is a funding pot, the volume of which is calculated based on the number of inhabitants. Citizens or their associations use this citizens' budget to implement their own projects in their community. Every person who lives in Thuringia has access to a basic amount that increases when people pursue a common project as an initiative group, association or a similar association. The State Chancellery should develop an uncomplicated issuing- and verification procedure. In addition, based on the inquiries, the State Chancellery monitors the local age groups and needs in order to connect, promote or specifically address them. This state program will be introduced as a pilot project and can then be further developed. With the approval of the state parliament, the right of every citizen to help shape civil society can be enshrined in the state constitution and thus lay a new basis for this promotion. We propose a budget of € 27 million.

#### ***2 – Creed of Participativeness for funding programs***

For every funding call from the state of Thuringia, to which independent and private sponsors can apply, the participation of different people in the project becomes a central quality criterion for the award from a certain funding volume or a certain funding period. The independent and private sponsors of state programs, or those who benefit from their funds, monitor the actors and participants involved in the project as well as the form of participation. This monitoring is to be reported to the funding agency and is decisive for the continuation and allocation of funding to the agency. The aim is to reach as many new people as

possible and to bring responsibility to as many as possible. Different standards are applied, depending on the size of the organization, funding volume and funding period. This participation motto is introduced and tested in the form of an administrative order by the state government.

### **3 - Guides for Civil Society Funding**

In public grants from the State of Thuringia, the position of a promotional pilot is included. This position describes a contact person at the local level who actively contacts and connects local actors and initiative groups. They connect them, record their needs, and help them to gain a sustainable financial independence. In this way, the funding guide builds up local skills and resources. The state publishes guidelines for the job description of a funding guide, which the applicant institution must use as a guide. Nevertheless, the task can be adapted to local requirements. It is possible for local organizations as well as public institutions to set up such a position.

Alternatively, such positions and similar functions that connect civil society actors and public grants could be set up in a state agency/information centre that centralises and makes accessible the information and counsel to gain access to public funding.

### **4 – Connecting democratic Ideals and formal Education**


The Thuringian State Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport creates mandatory participatory processes and rituals in schools, such as the election of the trusted teacher, simulated elections at the state, federal and European level as well as votes on internal changes in school with regard to the school building, the learning material, the teaching staff or other areas related to everyday school life under the title of democratic education in the curriculum. School is experienced by students as a co-productive learning process. Civil society organisations and networks can be partners in this process.

### **5 – More than Pilot Projects**

Future funding programs of the state of Thuringia offer, in addition to a







short-term piloting, the option of funding beyond the pilot phase. The Free State undertakes to finance projects that have proven effective approaches to receive at least 50% of the costs incurred. The idea of this change to current practice is to enable independent civil society actors to create sustainable projects and services without the permanent change well-working concepts and innovate for the sake of innovation. This could be combined with a longer funding period for established projects to lessen the administrative impact of having to apply and re-apply with the same project ideas on the implementing CSOs.

## ***6 – Structural Funding for Community Managers***

The state of Thuringia provides every municipality with € 200,000 annually for civil society work. With this money they finance two positions for youth- and social workers, including 100.00€ budget to develop and implement activities in their community. This budget is not tied to specific content-related criteria, in order to ensure that the two social/youth workers can work flexibly and use the funding according to the local needs of their communities.

## ***7 – Funding of Civil Society Personnel***

The state government is implementing a funding program with which personnel positions for civil society actors and their activities are financed. Private and independent actors in civil society can apply here for funds for a paid position for a limited time in an application procedure that is as straightforward as possible. Particularly if the applicant organization oversees projects that do not include project management costs, the funding program compensates for disadvantages.

## ***8 – Barrier-free Information & Knowledge***

The state government has commissioned a central information portal for civil society actors in which information about tools, funding, spaces, networks, local cooperation partners and other relevant topics can be found. This site builds interfaces for civil society actors on site, which they keep up to date with their own information. A state coordination office instructs the local volunteer officers in the districts and urban districts to keep the site up to date. This could be connected to Recommendation 3 – Guides for Civil Society Funding.

## 9 – CSO-Mentoring

The state of Thuringia encourages the networking of different civil society actors in their own social network, in which they network, answer each other's questions and support. In addition, information on events and projects can be distributed here. This network is developed by civil society actors themselves and financed by the state of Thuringia. This could take the form of a mentoring format financed by the state and implemented by networks of CSOs.

## 10 – Civil Society Magazine/Newsletter

The state of Thuringia is proposing a subscription journal "Zivilgesellschaft [en. On Civil Society]", which contains current information on the work of civil society actors, changes in framework conditions and upcoming events. It is published by civil society actors in cooperation with local publishers and invites local actors to publish. This could include a digital publication as well as a short newsletter that summarizes the most recent legislative changes relevant to CSOs.

## 11 – General Administrative Reform

The state government is striving for a comprehensive administrative reform, the aim of which is to improve services for citizens, reduce distance as a control instrument and promote a change of perspective for administrative staff. To this end, the state government commissions external expertise with a supervision, coaching and benchmarking process in which all employees are involved.

With a lean management approach, the administrative institutions of the state of Thuringia strengthen the personal responsibility of their employees. In this way, an overview of decision-making processes and their consequences is built up at all levels of administrative decision-making processes, and administrative employees' sense of responsibility is sharpened.



## 12 – Civic Competences

The Thuringian State Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport supplements the curriculum with practical events in which the working methods and decision-making processes of public administration are clearly explained. In this way, future citizens and civil society actors learn early



how to constructively deal with public institutions.

### **13 – Job-shadowing**

The state government is creating a job shadowing program in which administrative employees of municipalities and public departments who work directly with CSOs accompany the practical work of civil society actors at regular intervals, or for fixed periods of time. This gives them a better understanding of the work and daily reality of the CSOs they interact with on a regular basis. If successful, this program can be continued as a fixed administrative order, or a mandatory addition to public service work change in the law.

### **14 – Municipal Councils for the Future**

Each municipality establishes a future council as a parallel structure to traditional decision-making structures in politics and administration. In this open body, actors from all areas of city life come together, exchange ideas and develop joint projects. The state of Thuringia offers the municipalities coaching for working with this form of citizen participation.

### **15 – Citizens Consultations**

Municipalities regularly organize analogue and digital citizens: internal consultation hours. Here, citizens meet with employees of the administration in order to jointly develop ideas for the city and then implement them. The specific call to participate with ideas is communicated by local multipliers. This could potentially be combined with Recommendation 14 – Municipal Councils for the Future.

## **Italy**

### **Policy recommendations regarding the CS workers and volunteers**

◆ *Validation of the volunteering skills at national level should be promoted by all CSOs.*

The process of validation should be standardized and adopted across



the sector, as it could help to professionalize the sector itself and to distinguish an expert figure from a junior one. Volunteers whose skills have been thus validated could add their experience in their CVs .

◆ *Public calls for funding should adapt to different needs and competences. Special national calls should be created for small CS organizations that have less experience and expertise, but which are still important for delivering services to people that the public sector could never reach.*

In some cases, organizing training regarding the application (to take place before the actual opening of the call) could increase the chances of less professionalized CSOs and allow them to participate and access otherwise inaccessible opportunities.


It would be a good practice for regional/national calls to be revised by representatives of CSOs that are going to be the target of the call. In this way the applications would be checked by the CS to be realistic and not in contrast with the values/necessities of the specific CSOs services. To avoid conflict of interests CSOs who are in charge of this task should not apply for the call itself. CSOs are extremely heterogeneous in forms and topics of interest/action, and the public sector should manage this complexity by including them in the political and decision-making processes of which they are target.

◆ *Support the local Italian Civil Society by reinforcing existing territorial institutions such as the CAV (Council of Voluntary Association). The CAV is supposed to establish a connection between public authorities and voluntary organizations. The CAV should represent the CS in its dialogue with decision-makers/policy-makers, but to do so they should receive training in order to have an effective dialogue with the Local CS, and to be able to summarize and advocate for needs and solutions of the sector to avoid any inconclusive interaction.*

## **Policy recommendations regarding the SCU**

◆ *To make the Universal Civil Service a really “universal” opportunity for young people.*





In 2021, 125.286 applications were submitted, but there were only 55.793 positions available. Considering that more than 29% of the people between the ages of 20 and 34 in Italy are NEET (Eurostat, 2020), more funds should be allocated to the SCU. A more funded SCU would give more opportunities to young people to take part in the transition to the labour market.

◆ *The organizations affiliated with the SCU should receive a minimum compensation for the management/training work. Most often, such organizations do not take part in the selection of the SCU volunteers, but they are usually the ones managing the volunteers on a daily basis and organizing their work and training.*

The groups of volunteers can be very heterogeneous with regard to skills and knowledge, therefore in some cases there is a deep need for training. At the moment, the hours spent by the “hosting” organizations to train the volunteers are not remunerated, therefore it’s quite common that the so-called “Operatore Locale di Progetto” (the person responsible for the volunteers on a daily basis), beside doing its normal job in the organization also has to undertake additional tasks and train the volunteers on the practicalities of the job.

It can happen that those responsible do not train the volunteers even if needed because they don't have the time to do it (plus they are not paid for it), and the volunteers end up doing a job for which they have no training.

## **Portugal**

### **Waged labor vs. Voluntary Work //** **Waged Labour vs. Activism**

Part of the working conditions, the topic of the differences between waged labor, voluntary work and activism was recurrently mentioned. Especially the unclear and blurred lines between what can be considered and counted as waged labor, hence with recognized functions and tasks, and what constitutes voluntary work – but also the dilemmas

lived by workers who are simultaneously activists within the same organization and their substantial risk of burn-out.

It was criticized the exploitation of volunteers and the voluntary work and alerted 2 risky paradoxes for CSO. First, if CSO need voluntary work due to lack of funding, the overuse of voluntary work can “steal” paid jobs, favoring precarity. Secondly, the considered “free-labour” of volunteers lead this type of work to be overshadowed and disregarded by society as well as Governmental and funding institutions who already count with it to diminish the funding values destined to CSO.


Therefore, there is a need to recognize the value of voluntary work, to better delineate the status and conditions of volunteers (to prevent any kind of exploitation), and to establish a clearer limit between paid and volunteer work, bringing a bigger awareness to the experiences lived by volunteers.

## ***At the level of roles and functions of Civil Society Organisations (CSO)***

Much was pointed out in the sessions about what are the various duties and responsibilities of the NGO towards society, but especially toward their workers. Here, different realms converge and intersect for reflection: from taking more sustainable approaches to fortifying the character and status of the activities and works that embody them.

Attention was given to the necessity of a reinforcement of contacts and networks between CSO at all various levels. These may consider, on one hand, the formation of groups on CSO in accordance to their areas of intervention, the social groups they focus on, and, on the other hand, to allow CSO a more fluid contact in their distinct roles and factions. The issue of sustainability arose in the context of financing. It was commented about the allocation of financial resources in insufficient ways and to the “wrong places”. In the same note, short-term financing was equally criticized, as these hamper the continuous interventions from CSO to their target social groups. Once again, intimately related to the roles of CSO, is the call for





delineating practical differences between waged work and voluntary work. Touching upon the more perceptual side of this former topic, is that of the lack of credibility of the field experience of CSO by academic and scientific institutions.

## **Greece**


During the events, the local NGOs and the general public have found some ideas and solutions that could improve the local communities and could be easily adapted by the local authorities. These ideas can be concluded in:

- ◆ *Organizing environmental groups for hiking, afforestation and cleaning of the mountainous areas of the city*
- ◆ *During summer, cleaning of the beaches*
- ◆ *Planting of different trees in the city center, while adding labels with the names of the plants and brief texts of their characteristics;*
- ◆ *Adding lights in areas that are more likely for attacks against women*
- ◆ *Public interactive events for raising the awareness of the local community regarding the opportunities of participation in different areas*
- ◆ *Promotion of EU funded projects and volunteering.*

# /07

## *Conclusion*





Chasing Utopia gives purpose and direction, but is never truly finished, and in the same way even 46 activities in 18 months can only be the start, or rather continuation of a conversation that started long before the *Unsung Hero Dialogues* did, and that will accompany us long after. The challenges faced by civil society workers across Europe – and arguably across the globe – are structural in nature, from the professionalisation of the field to the public and financial recognition of its value.

***The *Unsung Hero Dialogues* had four core elements:***

- ◆ *Data collection and analysis (survey)*
- ◆ *Development of policy proposals on a local and European level (Autumn School, local policy events)*
- ◆ *Capacity building and discussion within civil society (Autumn School, local events)*
- ◆ *External communication (public outreach, local outreach events)*

Over these past 18 months, nothing has become clearer than the need for more work in all of those areas.

First and foremost, more, ideally representative, data is needed to properly analyse the diverse actors and groups within civil society in their individual and collective needs, in their economic makeup and challenges. Only when we have reliable and sizable data collections that can provide statistically valid insights into civil society, from volunteer to chairperson, can we truly start making the case for the changes only hinted at so far. And only then can policy recommendations be tailored to the needs of civil society workers.

**Considerable efforts will be needed to raise awareness for the work and value of civil society workers and the (financial) recognition of that work by both decision makers and the public at large.**

This will as well need to be accompanied by capacity building in outreach and advocacy/lobbying to more effectively promote the work and value of civil society actors and the ideas they put forward.

Lastly, a more comprehensive dialogue between civil society actors and the public administrations and funding programs that govern them is needed. A better mutual understanding of the inner workings of all involved will be needed for the development of new funding- and evaluation programs. Such a new generation of programs would recognize the needs of civil society and allow its actors to sustainably work in and for society writ large, while also acknowledging the need for evaluation and quality control.

At long last, the recognition of work means the willingness and ability to pay people for it. Money does not solve all problems, but at least in the early 2020s, an increase in funding in the area of project management and administrative costs alone would be of considerable help to those actors who need it most.

