

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN the Republic of North Macedonia 2020-2022



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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA 2020-2022

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

# DETAILED SURVEY FINDINGS

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## About the project

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

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

## About the survey research

The above-named project anticipates organization of survey research studies to measure civic engagement and participation in various societal processes and to establish the actual state-of-play in the civil society. This report presents findings from surveys conducted in October 2020, August 2021 and February/March 2022, all aimed to measure views and attitudes of citizens and civil society organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as to establish current affairs related to advocacy for the interests of citizens and civil society participation in policy-creation and decision-making processes.

More details about the research studies are given in the relevant sections on methodology approach for individual surveys.



## 2. CONTEXT AND STATE-OF-PLAY

The year when the third round of surveys was conducted was marked by several processes that could affect data collected on citizens' views and attitudes, and certain parameters measured. Although there were no election cycles in 2022 unlike the situation in 2020 and 2021, an important event was identified in the government reshuffle that happened in January 2022. Actually, the new government cabinet was appointed to office in January 2022, led by the new prime minister Dimitar Kovachevski, after the previous prime minister Zoran Zaev resigned in the aftermath of the electoral defeat at the 2021 local elections. Hence, it could be expected that changes made to public offices within the government college will result in certain oscillations under views expressed by citizens, but also by civil society organizations targeted with this survey research.

Moreover, the state was still facing serious challenges in respect to its aspirations to join the European Union, primarily due to the Republic of Bulgaria blocking adoption of EU Council's conclusions for approving the date of the first intergovernmental conference between the Republic of North Macedonia and the EU, which would have marked the official start of the negotiating process for accession in the EU. At the time when the 2022 surveys were conducted and after survey data were collected, negotiations between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria were taking place behind closed doors. Hence, citizens did not have full information about items discussed as part of these negotiations, except for the guarantees made by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia that the Macedonian language and identity are not subject of said negotiations. On the other hand, the public was often upset with comments made by certain politicians from the Republic of Bulgaria, who referred to firm positions upheld by officials in Sophia in respect to recognition of the Macedonian language and additional remarks made as precondition for opening the accession negotiations. Events culminated in July 2022 when the so-called "French Proposal" for opening EU accession negotiations was presented to state institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia and in the public, followed by a call on the part of some political parties and civic initiatives for street protests under the motto "Ultimatum- No, Thank You!", perceiving the proposal as the EU's demand for the state to engage in negotiations about its language and identity. While the negotiations with representatives from the Republic of Bulgaria and the European Union did not take place immediately before or during data collection under this round of surveys, we believe that the extended blockade could have impacted the respondents' views and attitudes in respect to the EU, as well as their perspectives about the future of the country.

## Possible comparisons with previous research studies

Vast portion of data collected under this research survey confirm trends observed and measures in the past when similar studies were conducted on this topic in the period 2012-2016,<sup>1</sup> including 2020 and 2021 surveys organized under this project.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, direct comparisons with results from previous research studies are impossible because measured attitudes and behaviours are closely linked to developments in the society and methods of interaction and communication with the community, which had been visibly changed in the current context, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying health protection measures and restricted movement mandates. For example, although the parliamentary elections were held in 2020, they cannot be equitably correlated to the level and the type of civic engagement measured or established in the period 2012-2016 due to the different nature of the pre-election campaigns, but also due to generally limited interaction and movement of citizens. The same is valid for the 2021 survey results, when the country entered another election cycle at local government level, which took place in the context of extended effects of the pandemic on the entire society.

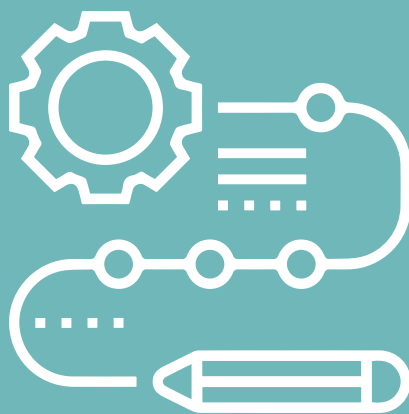
More specifically, this report provides direct comparisons of trends related to key issues researched under surveys conducted in 2020, 2021 and 2022, primarily in respect to civic engagement values and citizens' views and attitudes about the European Union. In that, it provides an overview of key issues related to types of civic engagement, but also citizens' views about the European Union, and views and experiences of civil society organizations.



<sup>1</sup> More information on results from all surveys is available on the following link: [http://graganskoucestvo.mk/graganskoucestvo\\_old/index.html](http://graganskoucestvo.mk/graganskoucestvo_old/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> More information on results from 2020 and 2021 civic engagement surveys are available on the following link: [shorturl.at/rvDN2](http://shorturl.at/rvDN2)





## 3. METHODOLOGY APPROACH

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

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

### Research methods

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

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

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

The most recent survey among the general population (2022) was conducted in the period 25 February to 17 March 2022.

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

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

Computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI) with civil society organizations, i.e. unassisted completion of online questionnaires programmed with the LimeSurvey tool. The survey questionnaire was distributed through the LimeSurvey service that enables detailed overview of invitations to complete the survey, verification whether questionnaires were opened, and monitoring the status of responses and replied invitations. This survey questionnaire was comprised of 73 questions grouped into 4 sections.

Data collection from civil society organizations took place from 15 March to 4 April 2022. This could be a result of reasons elaborated in the section on the context in which this year's survey research was conducted, but also due to increased volume of work among civil society organizations after the COVID-19 protection measures were lifted. As shown by survey data, this research study observed higher share of responses on creation of policy proposals and actions that are further advocated before the state institutions, which implies active engagement on the part of civil society actors and limited time for additional inputs, in addition to those made as part of policy-creation, decision-making and advocacy processes. Moreover, the period when this survey was conducted overlapped with a high number of surveys by other organizations, which could have created fatigue among respondents to provide feedback, especially against the backdrop of no improvements in their relevant sectors or insufficiently evident or tangible improvements.

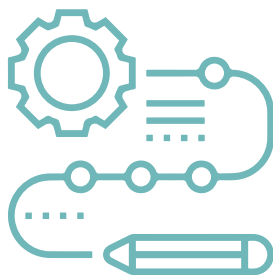
- ➔ Target group: representatives of civil society organizations, including chambers of commerce and trade unions, with the status of active entities registered on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.
- ➔ **Sample:** questionnaire was completed by total of 90 civil society organizations, of which 9 opened the link to the online questionnaire, while 81 of them responded to the closed-type questionnaire directly linked to their e-mail address.

## Sample framework and socio-demographic characteristics

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

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

Примерокот за граѓанските организации опфаќа 90 ентитети кои успешно го пополниле онлајн-прашалникот. Прашалникот беше испратен до 9100+ граѓански организации, но успешно го одговорија 90 претставници на граѓанските организации. Листата со граѓански организации беше составена од истражувачкиот тим и од практикантите на проектот, при што беа консултирани сите релевантни претходни Yesta-бази на граѓански организации, но со важна разлика во текот на истражувањето во 2022 година, бидејќи Централниот регистар на Република Северна Македонија Непосредно пред истражувањето објави нова ажурирана листа на граѓански организации. Оттаму, за разлика од претходните години, прашалникот беше испратен до сите здруженија на граѓани и фонYescии што спаѓаат во категоријата 94.99 „Дејности на други организации врз база на зачленување, Носпомнување на друго место“. Со оглед на тоа дека истражувачкиот тим Немаше можност Yes ги преглеYes сите 9100+ електронски адреси, дополнително беше креирана дигитална копија од истиот прашалник, која беше споделена на веб-платформата [dijalogkoneu.mk](http://dijalogkoneu.mk) и на фејсбук-страницата на проектот [Дијалог кон ЕУ](#), како и фејсбук-страницата на ФонYescијата [„Отворено општество“ Македонија](#) и [„Реактор – Истражување во акција“](#). Повеќе детали за типот на организациите можат Yes се најYest во соодветното поглавје, односно во дополнителниот дел од овој извештај, кој ги опфаќа граѓанските организации.







## 4. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – GENERAL POPULATION

As elaborated before, civic engagement is a crucial component of any healthy democratic society. Engaged citizenship, i.e. citizens who are actively involved in improving their communities and their country are a huge benefit to the civil society and key indicator of healthy communities, democratic state and satisfied citizens.<sup>3</sup>

This set of questions aims to define the context in which the surveyed population takes or does not take action within their communities, or more specifically, it aims to measure the citizens' sense of belonging to and their satisfaction with their closer or broader community, which is expected to be in close relation to their care for and engagement in the community.<sup>4</sup> In that, civic engagement is analysed in terms of three different aspects: (1) participation in civic initiatives for the common good, i.e. organization of citizens around actions that improve their communities; (2) practice of civic engagement as effort to address problems in the society, by contacting authorities or by participating in public debates, working groups, civil protests, petitions, submissions and proposals; and (3) conventional civic engagement, i.e. voting at parliamentary, local and presidential elections.

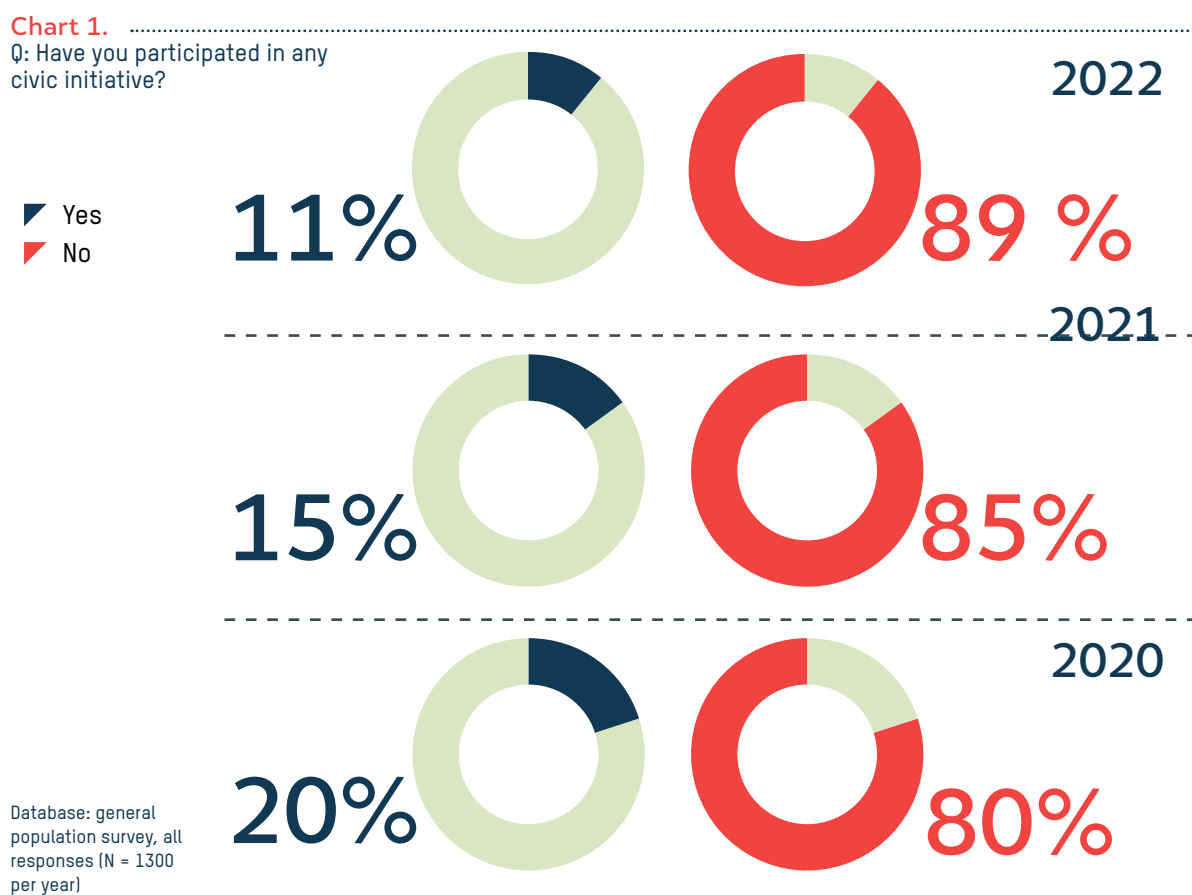
### **Status of civic engagement: initiatives, activism and conventional civic participation**

Based on data collected for all three survey years, it could be noted that participation of citizens in civic initiatives aimed at improving their place of residence and/or the country is marked by a downward trend. Namely, in 2020 around 20% of the population participated in some form of civic initiative to improve the society, while in 2022 only 11% of citizens participated in this type of civic engagement. Such drop by 9% shows a significant statistical difference and major decline in respect to citizens' participation in this form of civic engagement. Although the share of responses related to participation in civic initiatives is low, there are certain demographic differences that provide insight about which citizens engage in this type of civic participation. Namely, men are significantly more engaged in civic initiatives compared to

<sup>3</sup> Zaff, J., Boyd, M., Li, Y., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2010). Active and engaged citizenship: Multi-group and longitudinal factorial analysis of an integrated construct of civic engagement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(7), 736–750. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9541-6>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

women under all three rounds of surveys. Moreover, respondents with higher level of formal education are also more engaged in civic initiatives, while the opposite is true for those with lower level of formal education (no formal education, primary and secondary education). There are no significant differences among different groups under other demographic indicators, such as age and ethnicity (Chart 1).



Under all three surveys, majority of those who took part in civic initiatives indicated participation in actions for environmental protection and promotion. On the other hand, it could be noted that, after the increase in 2021 and after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, the share of citizens who participated in protests has again dropped below 10%. It should be noted that data were collected before organization of protests under the motto “Ultimatum – No, Thank You!”, which started on 02.07.2022.<sup>5</sup> An additional observation that should be indicated here concerns the fact that 2020 data covered the time period before emergence of the COVID-19 health crisis. As regards respondents’ demographic characteristics and having in mind that very small number of citizens reported participation in civic initiatives, the research team did not observe any significant statistical differences.

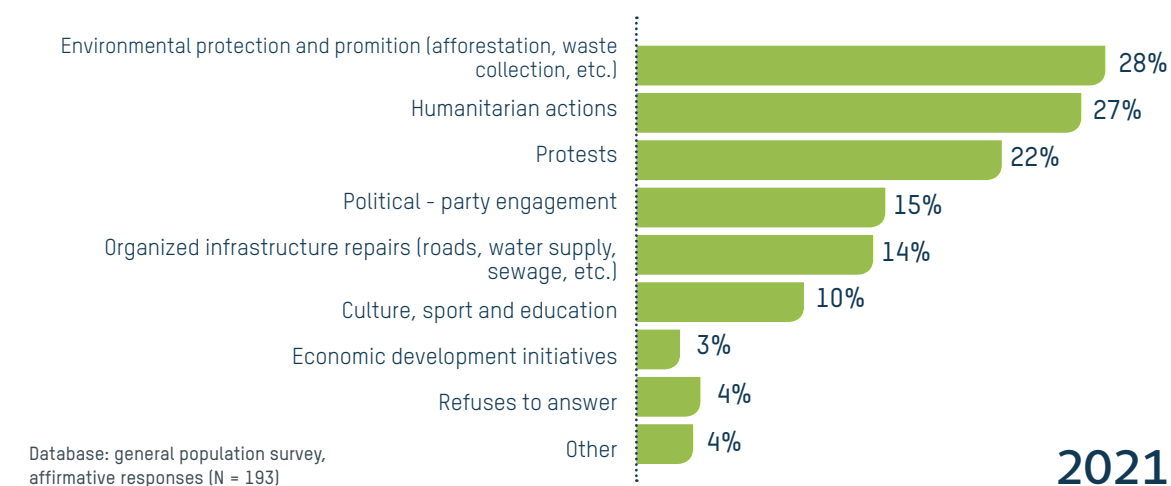
<sup>5</sup> While there were no formal organizers of these protests, they were supported by some political parties and civil society organizations that are against adoption and approval of the negotiating frame of the Republic of North Macedonia with the European Union, i.e. against the co-called “French Proposal”. For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/3S60nbt>

**Chart 2.**

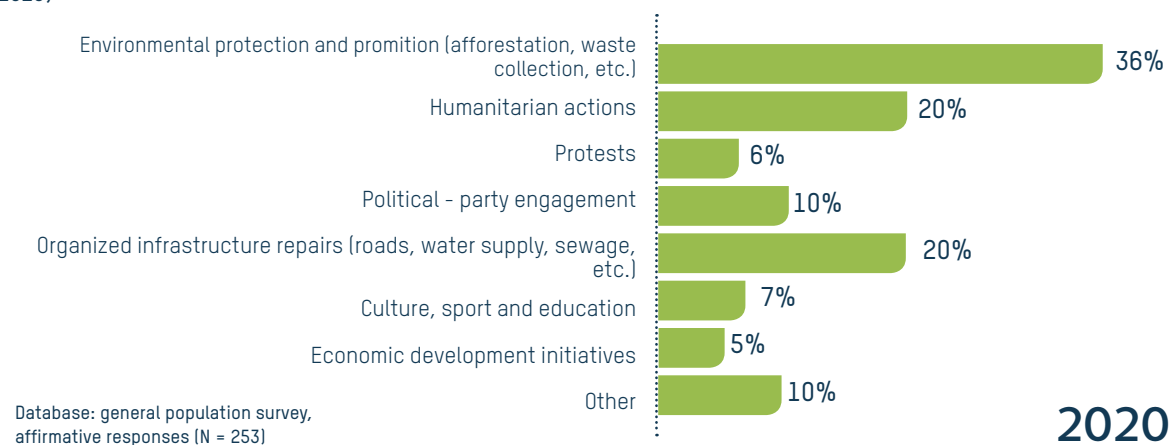
Q: In what type of civic initiative did you participate?  
(2022)



Q: In what type of civil initiative did you participate?  
(2021)



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



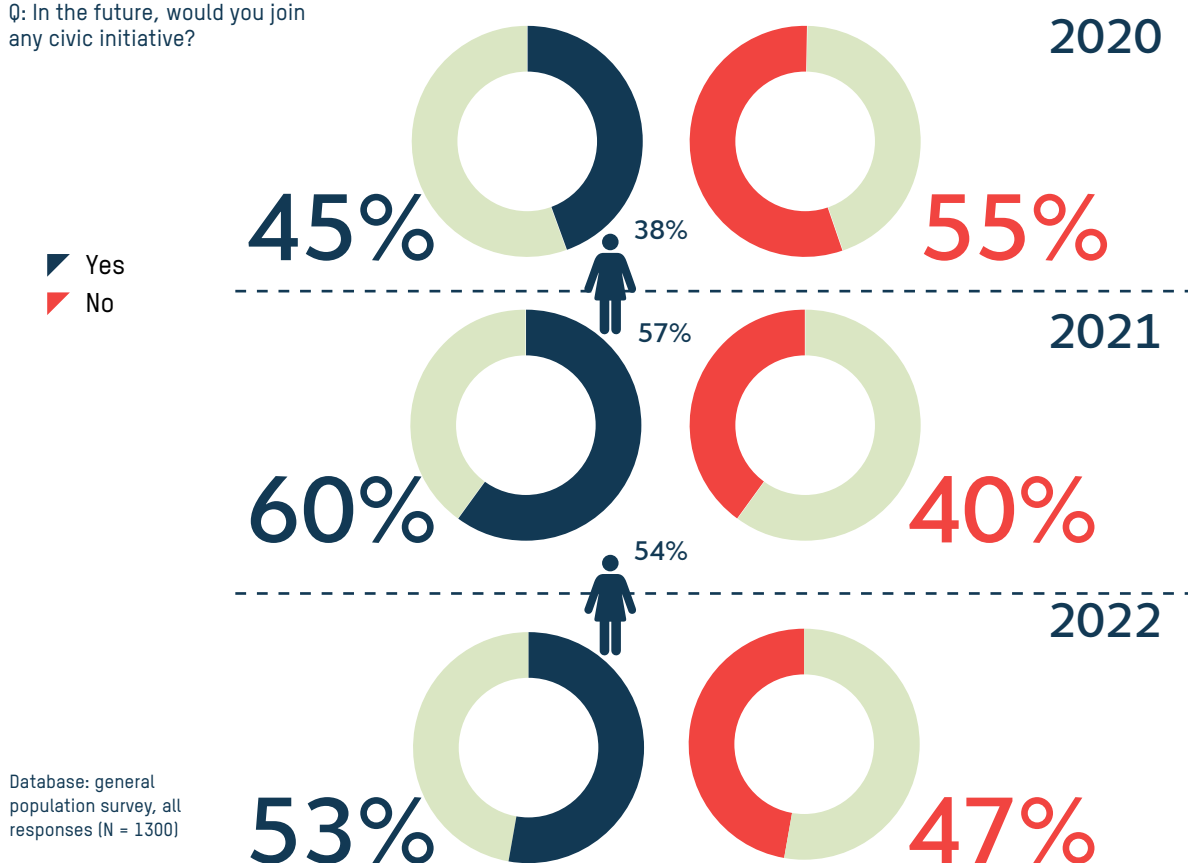


In addition to questions about civic engagement and forms thereof, citizens were also asked to indicate reasons for their low participation in this type of civic engagement. Under all three surveys, the most frequently indicated reasons for low participation in civic initiatives include: (1) claims that citizens do not have sufficient information and are not familiar with such type of initiatives; (2) lack of time and/or interest to join civic initiatives; and (3) distrust that their participation would make a difference in terms of problem resolution. Here, it should be noted that there are no significant statistical differences between various demographic categories of respondents.

Despite low utilization of these forms of civic engagement, survey results show an increasing trend in terms of possible future involvement in such initiatives compared to the situation observed under the first survey in 2020. Data presented on Chart 3 show that more than half of citizens would join some civic initiative in the future (lowest share of responses in 2020=45%, highest share of responses in 2021=60%). In that, the share of women who would join this type of civic engagement in the future is increased as well, i.e. the trend shows that more than half of women would join civic initiatives in the future (2020=38%; 2021=57%; 2022=54%), accounting for an increase by 16% compared to the results obtained under initial survey data from 2020 (Chart 3).

**Chart 3.**

Q: In the future, would you join any civic initiative?



It should be noted that, under the segment on possible future involvement in civic initiatives, data from all three survey years show significantly lower preparedness for future participation

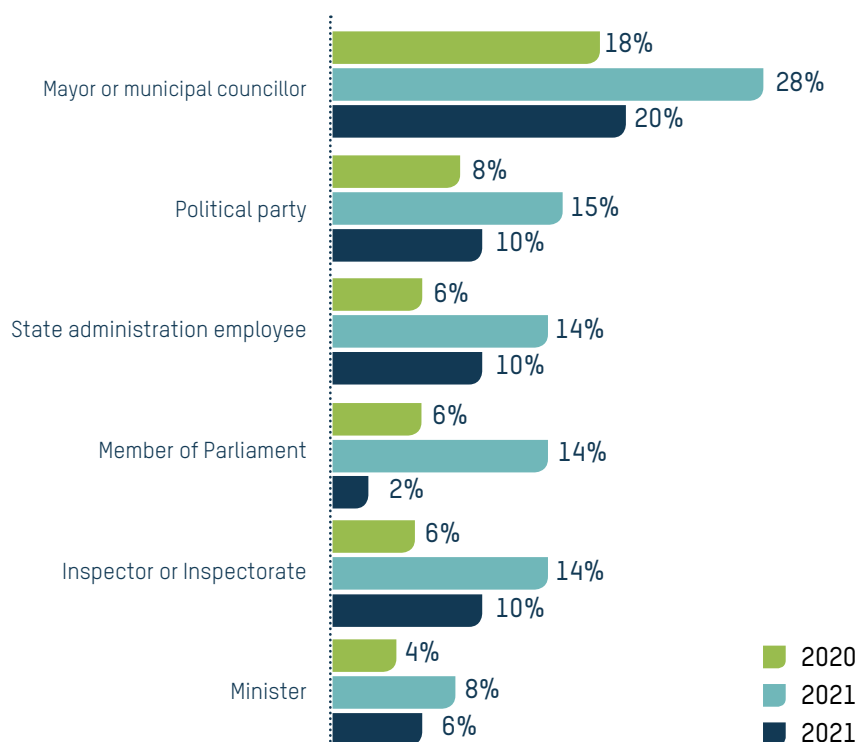
in this type of civic engagement among respondents from the age group above 60 years. On the other hand, respondents' formal education also has a significant statistical role in their responses. Hence, citizens with higher level of formal education are more likely to join civic initiatives in the future and to get actively involved in this form of civic engagement. There are no significant statistical differences according to other demographic characteristics of respondents.

## Contact activism and other types of civic engagement

As regards contact activism, i.e. citizens directly contacting the state institutions, data collected show significant oscillations throughout the survey years. One possible reason for such variations in responses is the fact that the 2021 survey was conducted during the pre-election campaign for the 2021 local elections in the Republic of North Macedonia. In other words, political party campaigns could have significantly impacted possibilities and motivation of citizens to use contact mechanisms for civic engagement. Hence, it is important to note that contact activism is the most utilized method for civic engagement reported under these surveys in the pre-election periods when political parties and coalitions are attempting to win over the trust of citizens. No significant statistical differences are noted under the 2020 and 2022 surveys. Public offices at municipal level (mayors and municipal councillors) remain the most utilized mechanism for contact activism aimed at resolution of societal problems (2020=18%; 2022=20%). On the other hand, contacts with state institutions at national level remain very low (below 10%) (Chart 4).

**Chart 4.**

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



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

Detailed analysis of data shows repetitive trends under all survey years. As indicated before, citizens indicated that they most often contact mayors or municipal councillors. Based on differences in responses given for institutions contacted by citizens it could be concluded that **citizens are more likely to contact political parties than their elected representatives, i.e. the Members of Parliament**. As reported in the previous years, mayors are perceived as political party's person who manages the local government, holding great power to "have the matter solved", i.e. to solve citizens' problems. Trends in responses according to socio-demographic characteristics confirm that **higher education level** implies greater likelihood for utilization of this mechanism for civic engagement. On the other hand, **young people aged 16 to 29 years** are by 10% less likely to use this method for civic engagement, which is indicative of the fact that youth either lack adequate social contacts to use this mechanism or do not apply this approach to resolution of problems they are facing or – according to data from other surveys on youth and civic engagement – young people do not trust the institutions (Westminster Foundation, *Social and Political Engagement of Youth*, 2022)

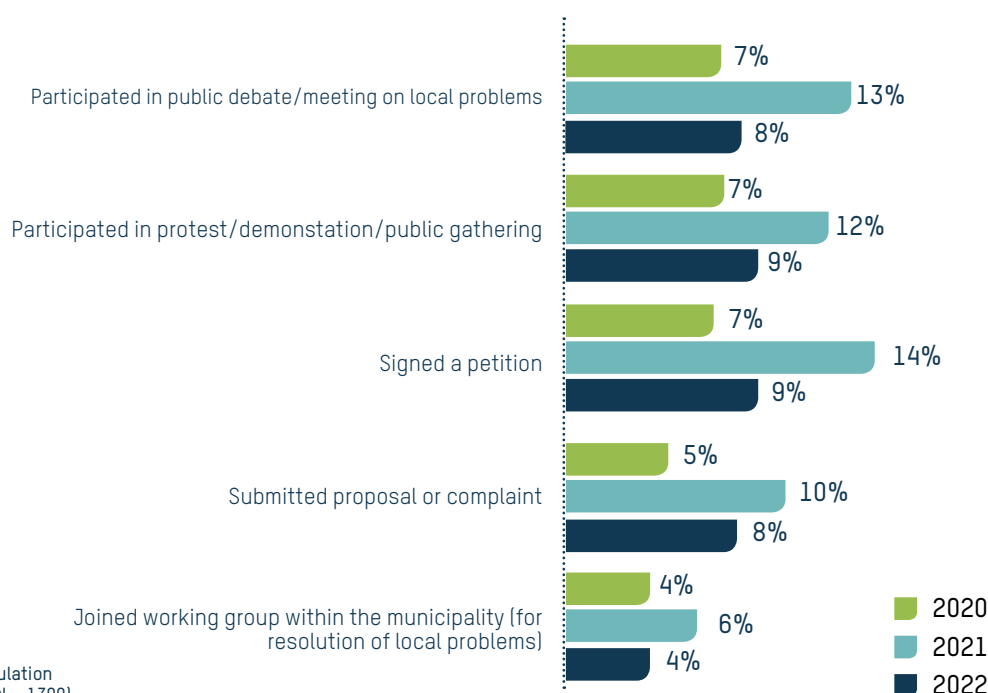
The overall situation in respect to contact activism continues to raise concerns and accounts for the least utilized mechanism for resolution of problems in the society and for civic engagement. Factors that have contributed to this situation were not additionally researched, but data show that whenever political party election campaigns are organized, citizens report greater utilization of these mechanisms, as was the case with 2021 survey data. This is indicative of the two-levelled structure that affects participation in this type of civic engagement. On one side, there is openness on the part of institutions and political party representatives, while on the other side, citizens demonstrate greater wish and trust that societal problems would be solved through these mechanisms.

In addition to oscillations related to contacts with institutions competent to solve problems in the society, survey data also show **oscillations in shares related to citizens' participation in different forms of contact activism**. While there is difference compared to contacts with institutions, it should be noted that only small portion of citizens have participated in public debates, public gatherings, have signed petitions, have used the opportunity for submission of complaints or proposals to institutions, or have joined working groups. This trend of low participation or utilization of such mechanisms is indicative of **the need for greater involvement of citizens** and full utilization of institutional mechanism for civic participation, especially having in mind the high share of citizens that would like to impact decisions taken at local level, but also at national level (Chart 5).

An additional important factor for reading data presented in Chart 5 and related to contact activism concerns the fact that age and education level of respondents play a significant role in their answers. Hence, respondents aged 29+ years and with higher education level are more likely to utilize these mechanisms for civic participation. On one hand, these data might show the need for greater familiarization of citizens with participation mechanisms (i.e. life experiences and higher level of formal education result in better familiarization with systems of civic participation). However, all three rounds of surveys did not engage in additional analysis of possible reasons for the state-of-play observed, and the low utilization of contact activism by citizens.

Chart 5.

Q: Have you....?



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

## Conventional civic engagement

As was the case under previous surveys, the trend whereby conventional civic engagement is the most utilized mechanism continued in 2022 as well, with minor and statistically insignificant differences between the three survey years. In all three years, more than 70% of citizens reported they have turned out at polling stations “on all or almost all elections”. However, this share is not necessarily reflected in official figures on voter turnout at the elections. Notably, voter turnout at the 2020 parliamentary elections accounted for 52%, while voter turnout in the first round of the 2021 local elections stood at 49.23%.<sup>6</sup> One possible reason thereof could be non-updated voter registries, but this should be additionally verified by further analyses and data collected under the 2021 population and household census, including monitoring of the possible cleaning of the voter register according to data collected during the census.

Additional concerns are raised by significant differences in respect to data collected according to respondents’ age. In particular, significantly lower share of **younger populations**, i.e. those aged **18 to 29 years**, reported voting on all elections (in 2022, the difference between the overall share of respondent having voted “on all or almost all elections” and the share of youth aged 18 to 29 years was slightly over 10%). Moreover, the same age group is marked by low share of affirmative responses to the question “For you personally, how important is voting at elections?” In that, there are no significant differences in response according to their ethnicity or gender (Chart 6).

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

**Chart 6.**

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

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

**2020**



**2021**



**2022**



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





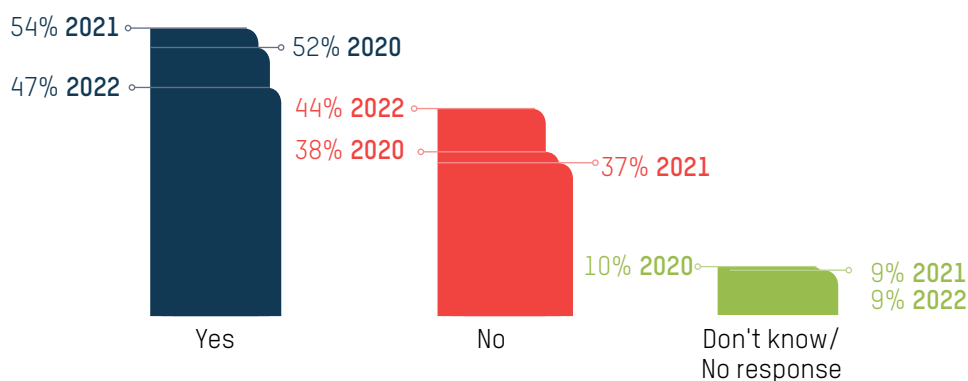
## 5. EU AND THE CITIZENS

Under all three surveys, this segment focused on citizens' attitudes about the European Union, their familiarity with and utilization of possibilities to join EU accession processes and to impact these processes.

Data show a trend of small oscillations throughout the years in respect to citizens' preparedness to join and make personal contribution in the EU accession and negotiations process. Namely, in 2020 more than half of citizens reported preparedness to join these processes, followed by statistically insignificant increase to 54% in 2021, after which the share of citizens who would join these processes for the first time dropped below 50% (2022=47%). These data show citizens' preparedness or, at least, wish to participate in EU accession processes, whereby those with higher level of education are more likely to express such preparedness. Furthermore, survey data are indicative of the need for additional reaction on the part of the institutions that would facilitate broader involvement of citizens, especially having in mind the low utilization of and engagement in contact activism and related mechanisms for civic participation, as elaborated in the previous section of this report (Chart 7).

**Chart 7.**

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

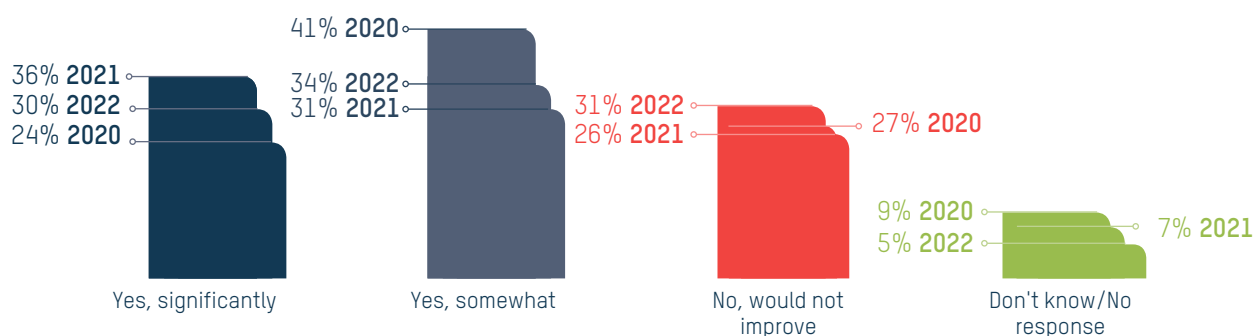


In addition to inquiries about willingness to participate in transformative processes that are part of EU negotiations and the country's EU membership, citizens were also asked whether they believe that the EU negotiations process would improve the life of citizens in the country. There are no significant statistical differences in respect to attitudes of citizens on this question, but it should be noted that, over the three survey years, **more than 60% believe that the country's accession in the EU would significantly or somewhat improve the life of citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia** (the sum of positive answers in 2020 stands at 66%, 2021 - 67% and 2022 - 64%). Here, it should be noted that 2022 data were collected immediately before the public learned about the conclusions taken by the EU Council and the negotiating framework, which was followed by public gatherings in the capital.<sup>7</sup>

As regards citizens' trust that the EU negotiations process would improve their life and the life of citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia, the research team observed small and insignificant statistical oscillations in responses. Namely, the number of affirmative responses (significantly and somewhat) always stands above 60%. On the other hand, there is small increase in respect to responses indicating that the life of citizens would not be improved (2022=31%) (Chart 8).

**Chart 8.**

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



Additionally, it could be noted that young people aged 16 to 29 years have indicated the highest belief that EU accession negotiations would improve the life of citizens in our country, while the confidence in this statement is the lowest among the eldest group of respondents (60+ years), with the same trends appearing in all three consecutive surveys. On the other hand, Macedonians are less optimistic than their Albanian counterparts who demonstrated slightly less prominent attitudes that the life of citizens would not improve (38% versus 19%).

In addition to their expectations about changes from the EU accession process, citizens were also asked how important is the country's membership in the EU for them personally. While there are no significant differences in respect to the total number of responses "very important" and "important" in the range around 50%, the 2022 survey data show a significant increase in responses that EU membership is not important at all (2022=19%).

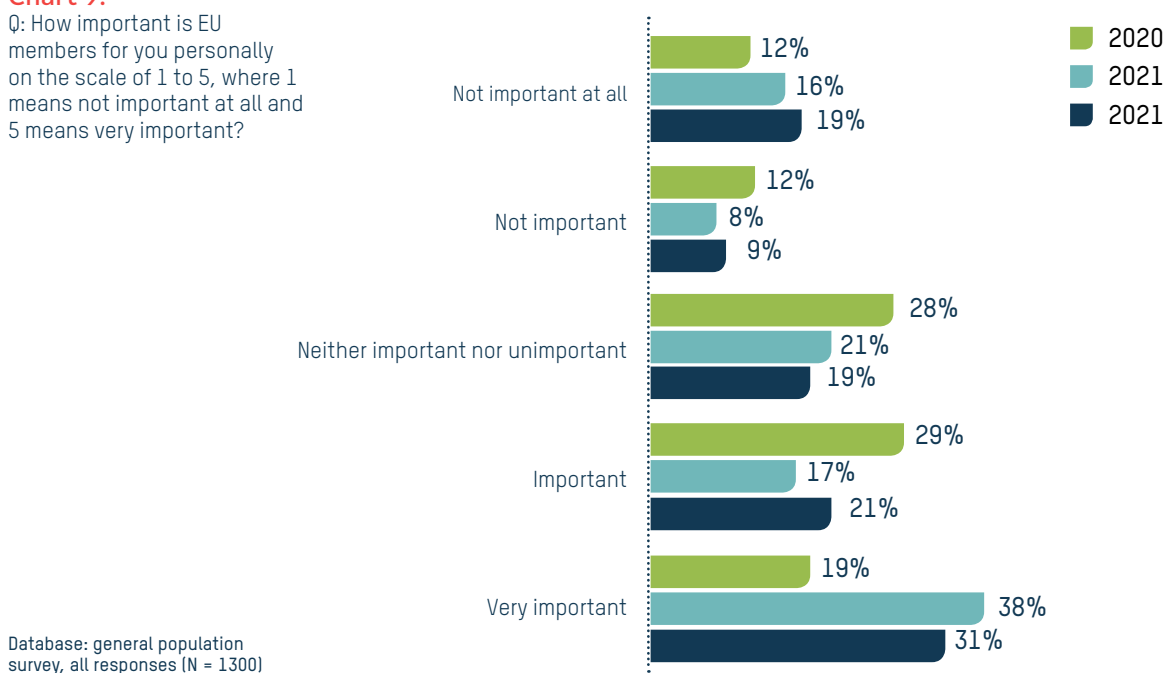
<sup>7</sup> While there were no formal organizers of these protests, they were supported by some political parties and civil society organizations that are against adoption and approval of the negotiating frame of the Republic of North Macedonia with the European Union, i.e. against the co-called "French Proposal". For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/3S60nbt>



Moreover, there is an increasing trend when survey data are analysed through the prism of the respondents' ethnicity. Respondents from the Macedonian ethnic community more often (2022=33%) responded that EU membership is not important or not important at all, unlike their counterparts from the Albanian ethnic community (2022=15%), which is indicative of an increasing EU scepticism among ethnic Macedonians (Chart 9).

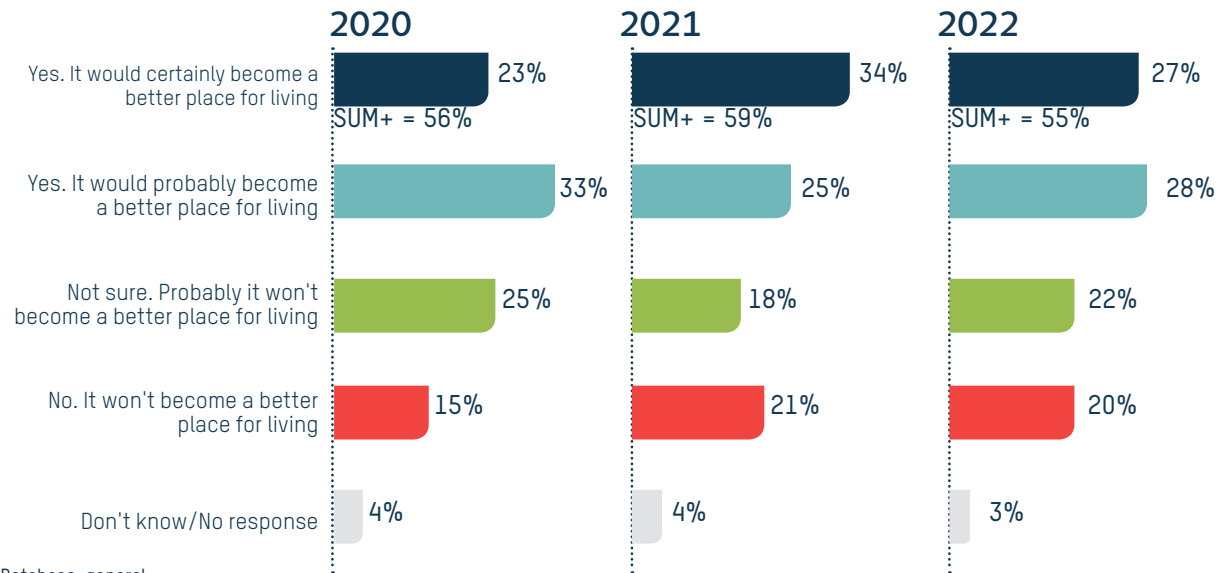
**Chart 9.**

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



As regards citizens' expectations after the country joins the European Union, it could be noted that, under all three surveys, more than half of citizens believe that the country would certainly or probably become a better place for living after it joins the EU. On the other hand, there are oscillations related to the two affirmative responses whereby the highest share of citizens that indicated the country would certainly become a better place for living after it joins the EU was observed in 2021 and started to decrease afterwards. Similar to observations on the importance assigned by citizens to EU membership, again there are different attitudes between respondents from different ethnic communities. Hence, only 49% of ethnic Macedonians reported positive attitudes (51% of them indicated negative responses) on the question whether the country would become a better place for living. On the other hand, 75% of ethnic Albanians indicated that the country would probably or certainly become a better place for living after it joins the European Union (25% of them indicated negative responses). Such data confirm certain developments within individual ethnic communities, especially among ethnic Macedonians, bringing to the surface some form of scepticism that transformative processes related to EU membership would improve the life of citizens in our country (Chart 10).

**Chart 10.** .....  
Q: Do you believe that the country would become a better place for living after it joins the European Union?



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





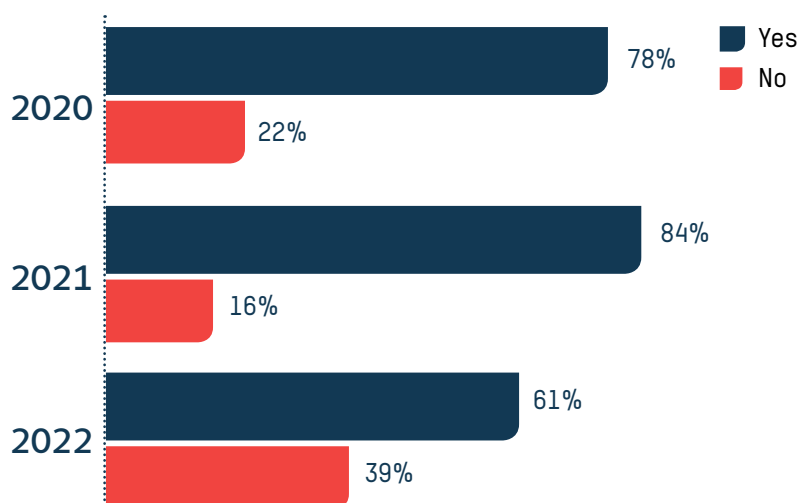
## 6. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVISM

This segment of the survey research provides an overview of data obtained from civil society organizations during the three survey years. Having in mind that data were obtained from civil society organizations and their responses were anonymized, whereby the research team does not know which organizations completed the questionnaire, it is impossible to infer permanent conclusions about any trends in this regard. This is especially valid against the fact that the 2022 survey sample included additional organizations that have been enlisted by the Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia. Given these possible oscillations within the civil society sample, it is important to note that comparisons among different survey years should not be interpreted as trends, but as individual information for the relevant survey year.

Based on data from the survey conducted among civil society organizations, it could be noted that, in all three years, they have relatively good knowledge of **mechanisms for civil society participation**, like the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society and the sector working groups within competent ministries. The highest level of awareness was observed in 2021, but it should be noted that the survey conducted in that year was marked by the lowest response rate on the part of civil society organizations. Only the 2022 sample is marked by a low number of civil society organizations that are familiar with sector working groups for IPA programming, but it is important to note that this year's sample was significantly different from the other two survey years (Charts 11 and 12).

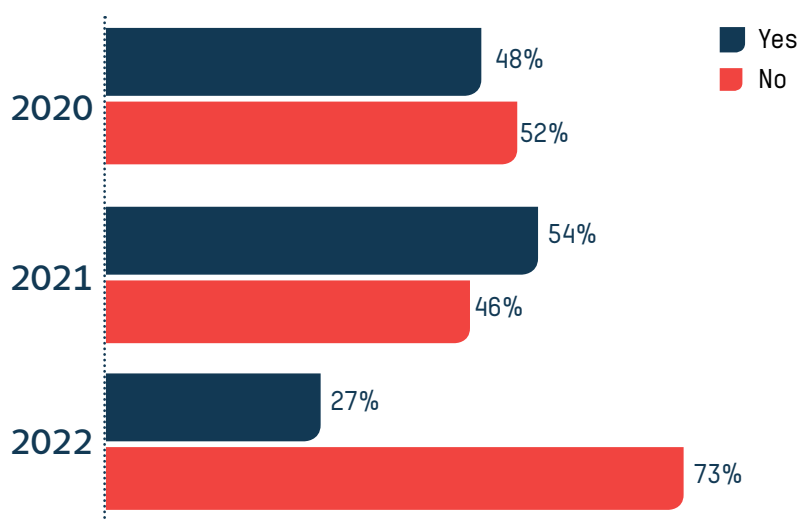
**Chart 11.**

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



**Chart 12.**

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

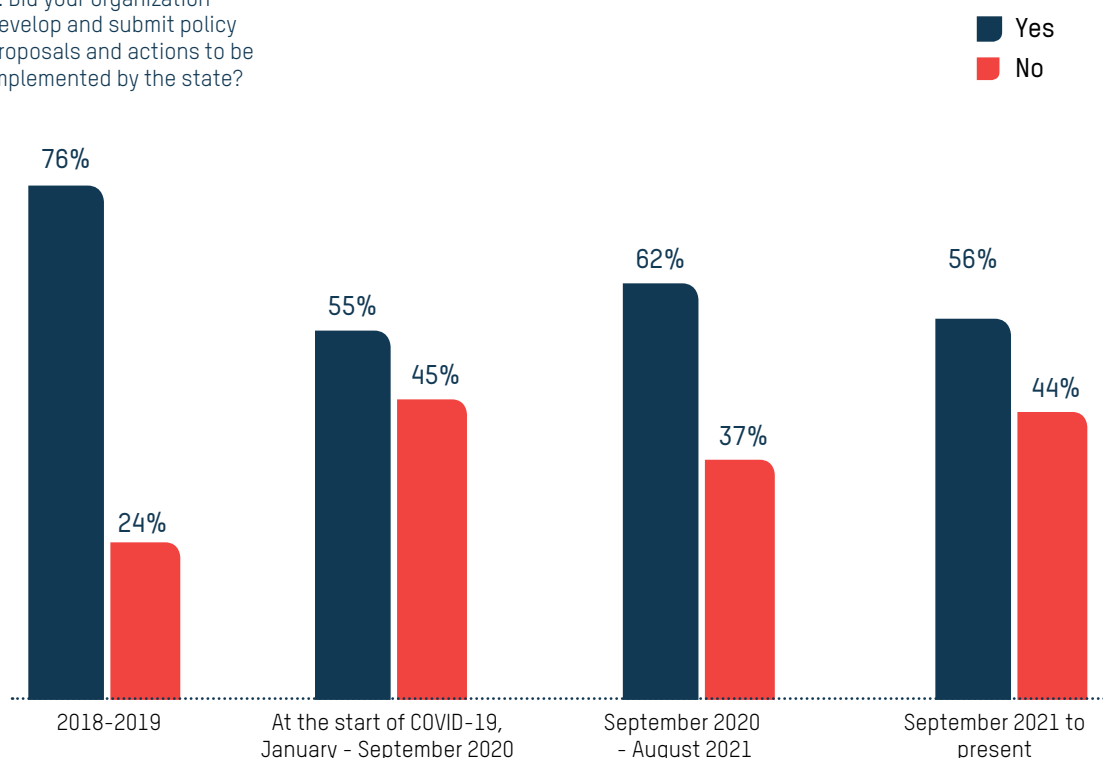


In addition to awareness about formal mechanisms for participation, civil society organizations were asked whether they have developed and submitted policy proposals and actions which can be implemented by state institutions. Based on their responses, it could be noted that there is significant decline in development of policy proposals and actions at the onset of the COVID-19 health crisis. The share of civil society organizations that develop policy proposals is again increasing, but it should be noted that, during the months when the so-called relief measures were designed, they had been significantly less engaged in development of policy proposals and actions to be implemented by the state. In 2022, slightly more than half of surveyed organizations reported they have designed policy proposals and actions that could be implemented by the state, but results for all survey years did not reach the share of 76% observed under the initial survey that covered the period 2018-2019 (Chart 13).

Moreover, throughout the survey years, the research team observed a significant correlation between participation of civil society organizations and development of policy proposals and actions on one side, and their membership in networks, on the other side. More specifically, in 2020 and the following survey years, it is evident that organizations that have reported being part of some network are more likely to engage in developing policy proposals and actions and advocacy for implementation thereof. **Such data confirm the importance of networking and joint actions on the part of civil society organizations, whereby 2022 data show that organizations that have completed the questionnaire are the least networked compared to the situation observed in the previous years.**

**Chart 13.**

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

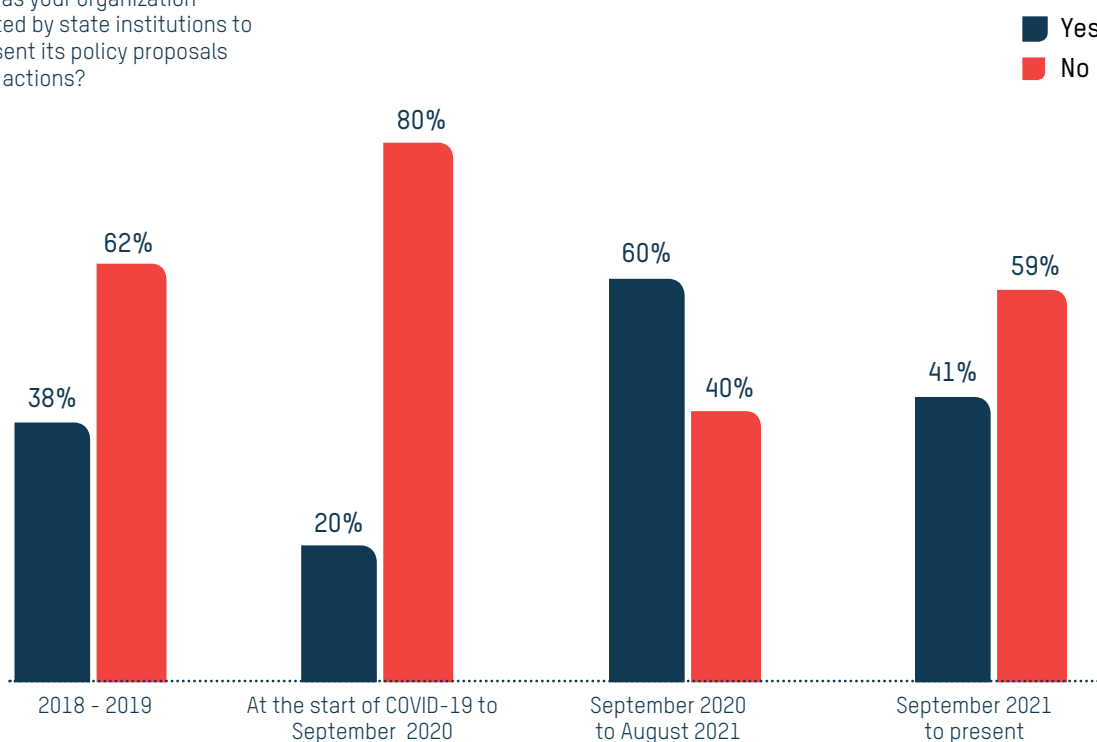


Lower activity in respect to creation of policy proposals and actions to be implemented by the state could be directly correlated to the failure on the part of institutions to invite civil society organizations. Based on survey data it could be concluded that, at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, state institutions have demonstrated significant lower activity in inviting civil society organizations to join processes for policy creation. On the other hand, in the period September 2020 – August 2021, there is increased participation on the part of civil society organizations, i.e. more than half of organizations from the survey sample reported they have been invited by state institutions (municipalities, ministries, parliament or government).<sup>8</sup> However, in 2022 the share of civil society organizations invited by state institutions again dropped to 41%, which is indicative of reduced possibilities for civil society organizations to present and advocate for their policy proposals, but this trend could be a possible result of the fluctuating civil society sample over the survey years (Chart 14).

<sup>8</sup> However, due to the small sample, this could also be due to the likelihood for statistical error in responses obtained and the probability that the questionnaire was completed by organizations that are more active and more frequently take part in these processes.

**Chart 14.**

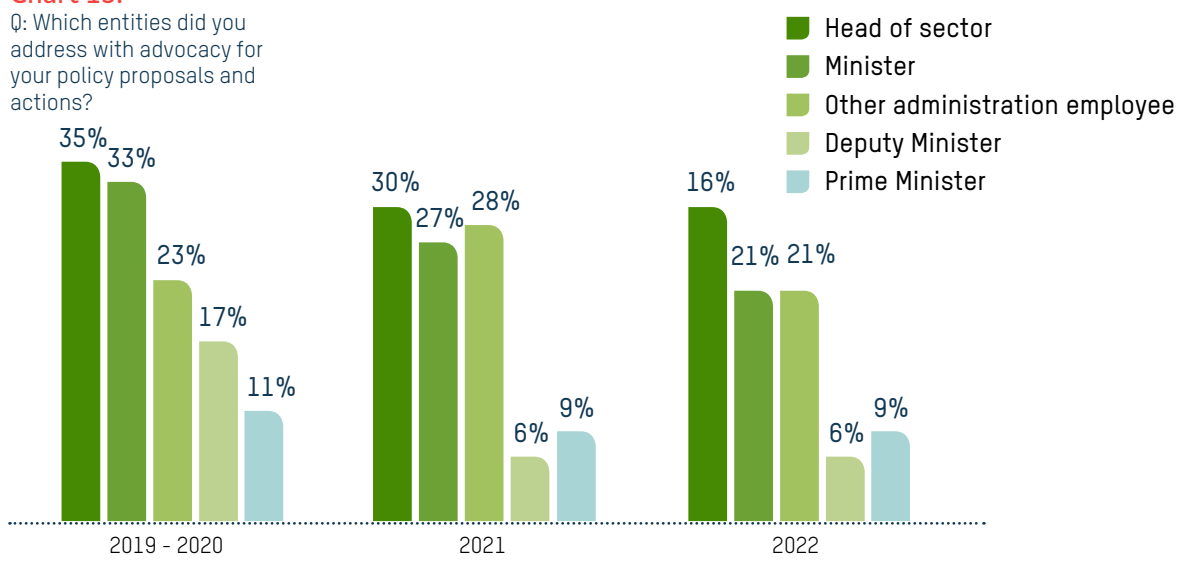
Q: Was your organization invited by state institutions to present its policy proposals and actions?



Previous two rounds of surveys allowed the conclusion that civil society organizations most often advocate for their proposal before heads of sectors at competent ministries. In 2022, the most frequently indicated instances for advocacy efforts are ministers and lower-ranked state administration employees. Based on survey data, it could be concluded that, irrespectively of the period when the survey was conducted, civil society organizations generally advocate before ministries competent for thematic segments of their work (Chart 15).

**Chart 15.**

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







# 7. CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Civic engagement is additionally conditioned by opportunities to impact decisions. As was the case in previous reports, in 2022, more than seven out of ten citizens believe they are unable to impact decisions taken in the Republic of North Macedonia. To increase civic engagement and active citizenship, citizens need to be able to feel they can impact decisions taken in their municipality or at national level.

In general, several trends are noted in respect to civic engagement and methods for civic participation:

- Conventional civic engagement (voting at elections) is the most utilized method for participation in all three survey years and there are no significant statistical differences in responses collected. On the other hand, concerns are raised with the fact that young people aged 18 to 29 years indicated significantly lower use of this method for civic participation compared to other age groups.
- Contact activism and participation in civic initiatives is marked by a negative trend, although 2021 survey data referred to a certain uptake in this regard. Moreover, the shares of responses related to contact activism are higher in the years when surveys overlapped with political party election campaigns. While affirmative responses are increased under such conditions, they are still very low.
- On the other hand, there is a trend of decreased participation in civic initiatives, but this is followed by a trend of increased preparedness among citizens to join this type of initiatives in the future.
- Key factor for participation by means of contact activism or civic initiatives is the citizens' trust that they can impact decisions taken at local or national level. Hence, it is important to note that citizens are still not confident they are able to influence decisions at local level, and even less at national level.
- Having in mind that there are no significant differences between the three survey years, i.e. equally low shares of citizens believe they can influence decisions, it is important to utilize their potential and their preparedness to participate in civic initiatives and decision-making processes by improving the overall impression about state institutions and by increasing the citizens' trust in them.

- ➔ There is both interest and potential for involvement of citizens in different mechanisms within state institutions related to the EU accession process. Hence, these mechanisms need to be further developed in order to facilitate citizens' engagement in contact activism and civic participation.

Under all survey years, there is a parallel upward trend for leaving the country, especially among young people aged 16 to 29 years. More than 30% of youth see themselves living abroad in the next 5 years. Having in mind these data, it is of exceptional importance to adjust contact mechanism for participation in order to ensure that young people are involved in political processes and have opportunities to be part of political life in the society (including an obligation to advocate for their needs through institutional channels).

More than half of citizens believe they can contribute to transformative processes that are part of EU accession negotiations and the country's path to EU membership. It is of crucial importance for state institutions to use this optimism and potential among citizens and to make additional efforts for designing mechanism that ensure greater civic participation. Non-utilization and non-involvement of citizens could lead to additional disappointment and negative trends in respect to civic engagement, but also to additional drain of the youth potential in the country.

Citizens continue to believe that the European Union could change the situation in the country for the better, but there are also signs of scepticism about the EU, especially among ethnic Macedonians. Importance of the European Union is still marked by high level of responses, but additional information should be shared with the public about the next steps on the road to EU membership, including clear communication of benefits from the country's accession in the Union.



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

Expertise of the civil society organizations needs to be taken into account and adequate mechanisms need to be designed to promote the process of mediation and awareness raising among citizens about existing advocacy for their views and needs on the part of these organizations. Nevertheless, the success of that process hinges on the need for institutions to demonstrate effort and take into consideration feedback provided by organizations, and use such information to advance specific policies and communication and management tools at local and national level, and to communicate all this to citizens in adequate manner.

Networking of civil society organizations continues to be of great importance, primarily in respect to joint creation of ideas, policies and activities, but also in respect to greater involvement in advocacy processes, as well as involvement of citizens in these processes, event at times of crisis. Hence, adequate conditions must be created for more successful networking and joint actions of organizations, in parallel with promoted legal framework and funding opportunities for civil society networks.



