

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)

A Summary of the Greece CSI-SAT Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the access2democracy (a2d, the CSI country partner in Greece with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index - Shortened Assessment Tool project. It is hoped that the evaluation will be used to generate lessons that will inform current and future phases of the project as well as the final global evaluation undertaken by CIVICUS. It is also expected that a2d will gain out of this evaluation through the process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned. The evaluation might also help to develop strategies for future civil society strengthening initiatives.

The evaluation attempted to assess the outcomes and outputs the project as developed by a2d and CIVICUS. Besides, it also assessed the project against other key criteria, such as relevance, validity, participation, capacity building, CIVICUS assistance, and sustainability, effective use of project resources, unintended changes and early impacts.

The evaluation included a mix of self-assessment surveys by the project partners as well as their evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of the project. The report was shared with the country partner and a final phone call was organised to discuss the evaluation and next steps. This document presents a brief summary of the key findings.

Key Findings

Project Outputs

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society and civil society strengthening practices at national level

This output has been mostly achieved. There are insufficient secondary data as research on civil society in Greece is still in a relatively nascent stage. Through the CSI project, the NCO indicated that they were able to compile all existing data, however limited, and turn them into usable information that they hope will serve as a reference for national and international comparative studies.

Shared understanding of the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders

For the NCO, this is the second most important output of the CSI project, and it has been mostly achieved. Aside from serving as a “point of reference” for subsequent civil society studies, the project, through the research activities it entailed, enabled CSO representatives to directly communicate with key stakeholders.

Improved self-understanding of civil society and better appreciation of its roles

The NCO commented that it was the first time for Greece to have a comprehensive and participatory assessment of their civil society. The CSI-SAT project, according to them, combined academic research with the opinions and experiences shared by CSOs during public consultations. This output, according to the NCO has been mostly achieved.

An assessment of civil society’s strengths and weaknesses as well as priority areas for policy and action

Based on a2d’s reflection, this output has been mostly achieved. The findings of the project will greatly contribute in “charting the way forward” for civil society in Greece. To some extent, the project underscored strengths and weaknesses of the current status of Greek civil society as well as generated recommendations for concerned CSOs in mapping future CS strengthening actions, based on secondary sources and the views of SAG members.

Project Outcome

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

The NCO reported that this outcome has been mostly achieved. For a2d, raising awareness on civil society despite the limited research that was done or the unavailability of reliable secondary data, is in itself a very useful outcome.

Project Relevance

How relevant is the project for civil society, the NCO and other stakeholders in the country?

1. Half (4/8) of the SAG members who responded to the evaluation agreed that the CSI project is mostly relevant to their work. The SAG evaluation noted that the CSI project, aside from highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of civil society, also offered a view of the dynamic interactions among its actors. In addition, the project encouraged networking among civil society organisations committed in furthering similar causes.
2. Access2democracy rated the project as mostly relevant to their work, affirming the rating of the SAG. The organization's mission is "to promote the principles and practice of participatory e-democracy within the global arena." The e-democracy paradigm, according to a2d, is applicable to any issue of public concern and involves stakeholders' participation; therefore, the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of Greek civil society is a "pre-requisite in implementing successful e-democracy projects."

Project Validity

Did the project succeed in providing an accurate picture of the status of civil society in the country?

The project's methodology, according to the NCO, generated a mostly accurate assessment of the state of civil society in Greece. As reported by a2d, there were "no comprehensive data sets" that could provide a historical perspective on civil society. Further, relevant sources were "fragmented" and "academic literature on the subject is sparse." Legislations which help facilitate and encourage the development of CSOs are also rather recent and therefore not well-analysed. In addition, a SAG evaluation observed that the CSI project was "rich in academic theories" but the absence of diverse civil society groups (e.g., women's organisations, immigrants group, etc.) during consultations affect the outcome of the report as it "failed to provide a comprehensive picture of Greek contemporary society." CIVICUS and the NCO suggested that in the context of Greece, the validity of the methodology can be further improved through the implementation of the full CSI as it entails a more rigorous and in-depth collection of data through primary research.

Capacity Building

Have any specific skills been gained as a result of implementing the CSI project?

Through the project, the NCO reported that they have acquired research skills specifically in participatory methods, gathering of secondary data, data analysis and interpretation, and report writing. The conduct of the SAG meetings has likewise improved their training and facilitation skills as well as enhanced their capacities in convening and networking.

CIVICUS Assistance

What was the quality of CIVICUS's support to the NCO as well as the NCO's role in executing the project?

1. According to a2d, CIVICUS was very supportive throughout the implementation of the project and they are completely satisfied with the overall assistance that was provided. The systems and procedures that were put in place by CIVICUS were also completely satisfactory as they were all “operational.” The CSI toolkit was highly commended by the NCO as it helped them “save time and energy” by providing guidelines in conducting research activities. Holding conference calls and providing report templates were particularly helpful.
2. The NCO has also expressed satisfaction with the CIVICUS country support person’s assistance especially during the drafting of the country report.
3. CIVICUS indicated that the cooperation has not been easy since the NCO did not follow the toolkit citing deviations from the scoring meeting procedure and from the country report drafting guidelines that were suggested. However, the report seems to have gone well despite the initial concern with the NCO’s background and focus. In particular, the project coordinator was commended by CIVICUS for being able to “considerably enhance” the quality of the project’s final output (the country report). CIVICUS gave the NCO a mostly and somewhat satisfactory rating for its overall implementation of the project. Likewise, CIVICUS acknowledges the efforts and commitment of the NCO in seeing the project to its completion despite funding difficulties.

Sustainability/Replicability

What is the NCO’s perception regarding implementation of the project in the future?

1. All of the SAG members, NCO and CIVICUS agreed that the full CSI is relevant and should be implemented in Greece. One member mentioned that this is the right time to implement said project as it would address the gap in primary data in Greek civil society and also to take advantage of the new partnerships amongst CSOs that had been developed through their involvement with the CSI SAT project.

Project Resources

To what extent has the human and financial resources been appropriate for the implementation of the project?

1. According to a2d, they had to finance the project from their own funds although they were able to maximize the available funding in the most cost-effective way. They were also able to obtain sponsorships from several organisations such as the MEDA Communications, the Greek Delegation of the European Parliament and the Katselis Group.
2. The NCO felt that human resources were mostly adequate for the project. They have indicated that the presence of an English editor would have been more helpful in polishing the report. a2d added that the work undertaken by the civil society expert as very satisfactory as the CSE’s knowledge on civil society as well as his network with CSO and research centres greatly helped in gathering almost every data on Greek civil society.

3. With regard to the time allocated for the project, the NCO remarked that it was completely sufficient. The templates and the monthly calls, according to them, were very useful and helped them save time and energy.

Short/Long Term Impact

What are the early signs of impact of the project? Have there been any unintended changes (negative and/or positive)?

1. One of the more recent developments reported by the NCO during the evaluation call was the emergence of a new movement among NGOs in Greece pushing for the amendment of the constitution to involve civil society in policy and decision-making.
2. The NCO mentioned that in their organization (a2d), there is now better knowledge and understanding of the current status of Greek civil society, while for their partner organizations, they have observed a marked improvement in terms of communication and networking.
3. a2d further reported that government institutions such as the Ombudsman, the Delegation of the European Parliament, and the Greek Representation of the Economic and Social Committee have shown a significant interest in civil society after their involvement with the project. The Economic and Social Committee has even published “Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)-Initiative Opinion” on September 2005 to contribute to the nationwide debate on and inform the public about the role of civil society.