



**Pravno-informacijski center nevladnih organizacij - PIC**  
**Legal-information centre for NGOs, Slovenia – LIC**

**Povšetova 37**  
**1000 Ljubljana**  
**Slovenia**  
**<http://www.pic.si>**

**Matej Verbajs**

# **AFTER 15 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE AND A NEW REGIME: ACTIVE, BUT STILL WEAK**

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**CIVICUS Civil Society Index**  
**An international action-research project coordinated by**  
**CIVUCUS, World Alliance for Citizens Participation**

Collected, arranged and written by: Matej Verbajs

Co-authors and co-writers (the team of Legal-information centre for NGOs, Slovenia - LIC)

- Primož Šporar (professional support and expert review),
- Teja Baloh (Corporate social responsibility study, help with media review)
  - Other employers and volunteers of LIC.

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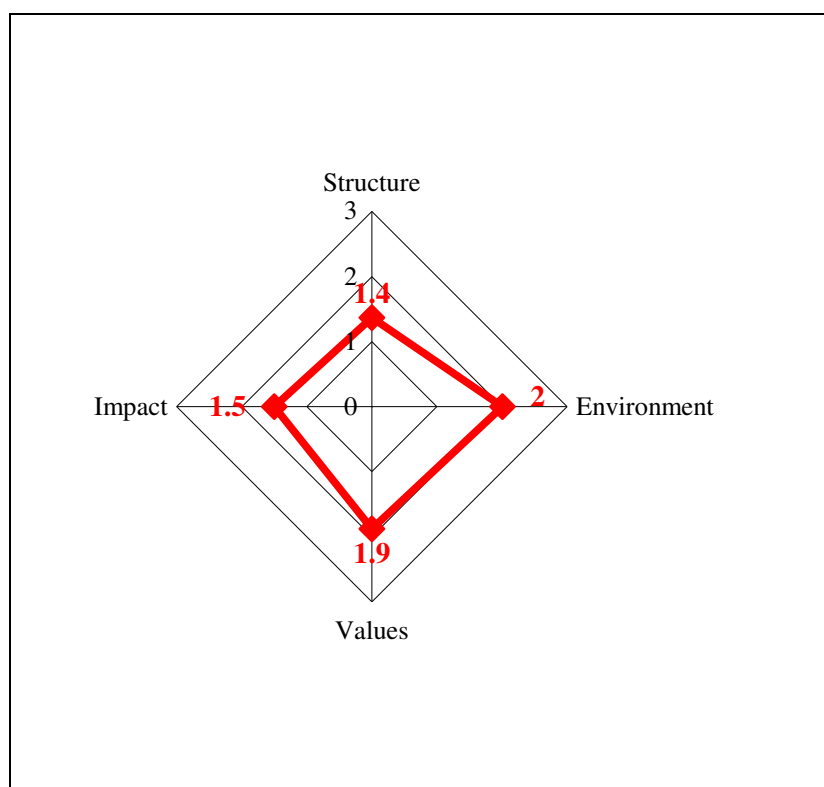
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project is an international action-research project analysing the state of civil society at country level. One of its main outputs is comprehensive country reports, which include scores for 74 indicators as well as recommendations for actions to strengthen civil society. The project is coordinated worldwide by the international civil society network CIVICUS. In Slovenia the project was carried out by the Legal-information Centre for NGOs, Slovenia (LIC), guided by a working group of 17 civil society experts. Over the course of 2004 and 2005 LIC collected information and data from a broad range of civil society representatives, citizens, experts and researchers on the state of civil society in Slovenia, which is presented in this report.

The Civil Society Diamond summarises the results of the CSI assessment in its four main dimensions: the structure of civil society, the environment in which civil society operates, the values it promotes and the impact of civil society on other sectors. Each dimension is scored from 0 to 3, where 3 is the highest score. The scores for Slovenia are shown in figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1: Civil Society Diamond for Slovenia**



The overall structure of Slovenian civil society in human, organisational and economic terms is rather weak, despite the fact that charitable giving is widespread (practised by 66% of citizens) and that more than half of the population (55%) is a member or otherwise active in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The rather significant participation of citizens is closely linked with a large number of formal CSOs in Slovenia, which is estimated to be around 25,000. Other indicators of civil society's structure are weaker. The Civil Society Survey 2005 revealed that

only 12% of citizens were engaged in voluntary work for CSOs, compared to 52% of citizens who worked voluntarily outside such organisations, such as shopping and child care for others. This indicates that systematic support to encourage voluntary work within CSOs is needed, which is also recognised by the government. Moreover, a survey among CSOs and the regional consultations indicated that not all social groups are equally represented within CSOs in Slovenia, such as, for example, poor people and the rural population. Also, the level of communication among civil society actors was described as quite moderate and mainly done via informal channels. The weakest component of civil society's structure relates to the lack of financial and human resources, which has in the past been a weak point of Slovenian civil society. Whereas the sector often relies on volunteers, they are usually inexperienced and lack the required skills. A positive factor was the rather frequent establishment of umbrella organisations, particularly for types of associations that traditionally exist in Slovenia, such as the fire brigades and sport clubs. In addition, these umbrella bodies were rated by civil society actors as rather effective.

The in-depth examination of civil society's environment in Slovenia shows it is somewhat enabling. No major political or socio-economic factors inhibit the development of civil society, even though some of the relevant indicators did not receive the maximum score. Basic human rights and freedom are respected and the research showed that a rather positive social-cultural context exists, as indicated by high levels of trust among people (36% of Slovenian citizens trust fellow citizens) and high public spiritedness. However, members of the National Advisor Group (NAG) pointed out that trust and tolerance are often only based on principles and when it comes to practising trust and tolerance, they are not that high.

The legal environment for CSOs shows a mixed picture. The official registration processes for CSOs is rather quick and inexpensive. Civil society actors are also allowed to perform advocacy activities. However, other aspects of the legal environment are not so enabling. There are some tax benefits for philanthropy, but they are rarely used since they are not promoted and the same level of tax reduction also applies to donations for education or investments in governmental stocks. While CSOs are generally exempt from taxation on income, they are obliged to pay taxes for their business activities, which in practice make most of their income taxable. There are also no special tax exemptions for CSOs with public interest status.

Relationships between civil society and the public sector, and especially the business sector, leave much to be desired. Dialogue between government and civil society is not formalised or systematised, which causes confusion, a negative atmosphere and makes the use of personal contacts prevail when CSOs seeks to talk to state authorities. The private sector's attitude towards civil society is generally indifferent and companies participate rarely in broader civil society initiatives.

The CSI assessed civil society's values as rather positive. Civil society is active in promoting democracy, non-violence, gender equity, tolerance and environmental protection, but there appears to be a lack of activities in the fields of transparency and poverty eradication. Transparency is observed within the sector itself, but less promoted in society as a whole. Interestingly, civil society actors are not aware of significant corruption within the sector.

Looking at civil society's impact, its actors' capabilities are limited when trying to influence other sectors, such as the private or the public sector. Civil society is not very successful when trying to influence public policy, even though it is rather active in this field. Similarly, with regard to the national budgeting process, despite being generally regarded as a rather open process, this did not show strong impact by civil society actors. In a similar vein, civil society is not seen as successful in trying to hold the state or business accountable.

Different from civil society's weak performance in its relations to government and business, the extent to which CSOs empower citizens was evaluated as rather strong. There are various civil society actors informing and educating different social groups such as the disabled people or the Roma minority. Moreover, some CSOs are rather successful in the field of environmental protection when building capacity for collective actions.

A separate media study, which was carried out as part of the CSI project, found that the media does not report on civil society, as much as civil society actors would like. However, some CSOs are starting to liaise more strongly with the media and making themselves more visible. In general, the media presents civil society in a positive light. The majority of news is related to organisations working in the field of social services and health care.

For the first time in Slovenian civil society, a comprehensive and participatory assessment of civil society has been carried out through the CIVICUS Civil Society CSI project. The study has found that further development of civil society in Slovenia will require a focus on structural features, particularly ensuring sufficient resources and strengthening of communication among civil society actors. The lack of professional staff in the sector, which has been mentioned as a crucial weakness, points towards the need to stimulate professionals to take up jobs in the sector. This weakness has other negative consequences, such as incapability to properly apply for grants or successfully coordinate different partnerships and coalitions. Another recommendation made by participants was aimed at improving civil society's impact on other sectors by contributing to strengthen the awareness of the importance of civil society on the national level and the role of CSOs in society as a whole. This could be achieved by: implementing contests on civil society issues in formal education programmes, so that students better understand the role of civil society; initiating a systematic dialogue between civil society and government that would involve all government bodies and by promoting examples of good practices. These and many more recommendations were made at the National Workshop, which brought together more than 40 stakeholders to discuss and interpret the findings of the report and come up with specific recommendations and priorities for the future development of Slovenian civil society.

When scoring the indicators a rather strict point of view and quite some criticism were revealed by civil society actors. Namely, in some cases, they didn't acknowledge the situation of Slovenian CSOs to be as good as represented by the data and would prefer a lower score than actually given and the end.

Generally speaking during the last few years, the Slovenian civil sector has been seen more as a coherent sector rather than just a disparate range of separate organisations. When looking at the sector as a whole it is clear that Slovenian civil society is growing and strengthening its capacity, even though its social and political impact remain low. Another encouraging sign is the activities

among government and civil society, which are seeking to establish mutually positive relations. This shows that the public sector is slowly becoming aware of the important role of civil society. These developments give hope that civil society will be able to further develop and strengthen its position within Slovenian society in the future.