

Most NGOs in the Czech Republic have more support than they seem to have. There are 12 % of active opponents

Prague, January 29, 2021 - Public trust in non-governmental or non-state non-profit organizations (hereinafter designated "NGO" or "civic organizations"), long measured by research agencies, has much more finely articulated contours than it might appear in previous surveys [1]. The study found that in some areas NGOs have surprisingly high ratings. The Czech public views the work of countless specific civic organizations very positively, although it is more sceptical of civic organizations in general and of some subcategories of civic organizations. Positive attitude towards established "brands" or groups of organizations providing social services or humanitarian aid is up to twice as high as general positive attitude towards civic organizations. This emerges from a joint survey by STEM, PAQ Research and Median.



The term "non-profit organization" has been assigned particular meanings in the public sphere, largely defined by the negative attitudes of some political entities and media. Therefore, it is worth considering increasing use of terminology that implies more concrete content, such as association, local organization or charitable organization, which is associated with helping others. "It turned out that under the name of a non-profit organization, each person imagines something completely different and some of them nothing at all. Measuring trust in non-profits as one group of organizations is not very informative, because some types of non-profits are extremely popular and some unknown to the public, others suspicious," Nikola Hořejš from STEM summarizes the conclusions of the introductory interviews with respondents. "The research is unique in that it did not study the attitudes towards unclear concepts like 'non-profit' or 'non-governmental organizations', but to the entire sector through the types of activities, focus of organizations and typical representatives," adds Hořejš.

"The attitudes of a large part of society are formed on the basis of how the non-governmental sector is talked about in the media and how some politicians talk about it," explains Daniel Prokop from PAQ Research. "Previous surveys mainly measured respondents' perception of the terms 'non-profit organization', resp. 'non-profits', which - for part of society - have gained a negative connotation. You will get completely different results when you examine the relationship with "charitable", "humanitarian" organizations, but also those that strive to protect the environment," adds his colleague Tomáš Dvořák.

"The research will help civil society organizations to better communicate with the public and better analyze their position in society," said Petr Lebeda, director of Glopolis, which commissioned the research.

Five parts of Czech society



Segmentation of Czech society in relation to civic organizations:

Active Supporters 26 %

Support all types of NGOs – active in donating money and also in non-financial activities. Tend to include younger generations and people with higher education levels. Residents of large cities.

Passive Supporters 20 %

Positive relationship to most NGOs (neutral to foreigners and politics), but passive in terms of giving financial and non-financial support. Tend to include people with lower income levels and less interest in politics and public issues.

Selective 29 %

Support NGO areas selectively: youth, humanitarian aid, social and charitable areas. Dislike foreigners and politics. Relatively engaged in helping their favourite NGO and potentially active against those they dislike.

Distrustful/Alienated 13 %

Neutral stance to all NGOs with low variance. Totally disengaged (both for/against). Politically passive, lack of interest in social issues. Distrust in institutions, low education level and low status.

Active Opponents 12 %

Do not support any area of NGO operation. Negative particularly in regard to foreigners, politics, as well as gender and ecology. Older generation, more frequently men.

The things that people expect civic organizations to provide, above all, are awareness-raising, collections and offers of material assistance, but they (with the exception of Active Supporters) do not want NGOs to be politically active in the public sphere. It is interesting that people were unable to identify critical social problems that civic organizations are not addressing and should be addressing. On the other hand those who have a negative approach towards civic organizations are generally very keen on having social problems and political corruption addressed. "These are segments that at the same time do not trust politicians, and this distrust spills over into the negative evaluation of other institutions such as the state, civic organizations or the EU," explains Tomáš Dvořák.

People distinguish between activities and types of assistance

People of lower social status are often lacking strong attitudes towards NGOs whereas groups with higher social status (including those with above-average income) tend to have more distinct attitudes, both positive and negative. "We should not be subject to the stereotype that a typical critic is unemployed with a lower education. According to our findings, it is more of the older generation,

which often has a good education and income, but conservative values that lead it to reject topics such as environmental and gender issues or the integration of minorities," says Nikola Hořejš.

Specific areas of NGO activities are perceived significantly differently. People emphasize the proximity and usefulness of organizations that focus on social or humanitarian aid, but misunderstand organizations that focus on the integration of minorities or foreigners. At the same time, the relationship to the topic clearly influences the attitude to the organization. "One might say that even if the services of a certain organization were of the best quality and its financing is completely transparent, the public will perceive them negatively if they help groups to which it has a strong distance," explains Nikola Hořejš. It also often happened that they did not trust "non-profits", but gladly and often contributed to one particular organization. The reason is their little knowledge of the principles of community services, gifts and grants," he adds.

What is quite surprising - according to him - is the relatively positive perception of organizations operating in the fields of environment protection and equal rights for men and women. People are less perceptive of the origin and size of civil society organizations. In general, they prefer smaller, Czech organizations. However, they are concerned with these organizations' ability to achieve expected outcomes. Large and foreign organizations are largely considered to be more effective but also less honest and less likable.

It is encouraging, however, that people do not identify any significant gaps in the spectrum of topics that civic organizations address. 53 % of the respondents were unable to identify any topics that are important yet systematically neglected or underestimated by NGOs. Relatively speaking the most neglected themes are political corruption, food quality and the financial situation of senior citizens.

Affinity for specific, well-known "brands" are up to twice as high as affinity for the sector in general. Organizations working on humanitarian, charity and social assistance were rated "rather or definitely likable" by 60-86% of respondents who said that they know the given organization at least by name. These organizations included, for example, the Red Cross, ADRA, the People in Need Foundation, Doctors without Borders, Good Angel, Sokol, Charity Czech Republic and Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

Trust in NGOs is linked to trust in public institutions in general

A turning point in NGO perception trends was already visible between 2012 and 2013. Several years before the so-called migration crisis, negative perceptions of NGOs began to emerge among people with a left-wing stance, pensioners and unemployed people with lower education levels, who, up until that point, had in fact had the lowest levels of distrust towards NGOs.

According to Daniel Prokop from PAQ Research, this phenomenon was most likely due to the delayed consequences of the financial crisis and related rise of populist issues. "The society seems to be divided into ordinary people and incompetent, detached elites. People began to classify part of the non-governmental sector as those elites," explains Daniel Prokop.

According to the authors, research has shown that attitude characteristics, which may be called cultural, i.e. ideology, worldview and personal value structure, play a much larger role in determining different affinity and trust levels.

The development of trust in non-governmental organizations cannot be separated from how the public's relationship to other so-called public institutions has evolved. Trust in public institutions correlates, to a large degree, to overall trust in the functioning of the political system, higher satisfaction with the Czech Republic's membership in the European Union, a lower degree of belief

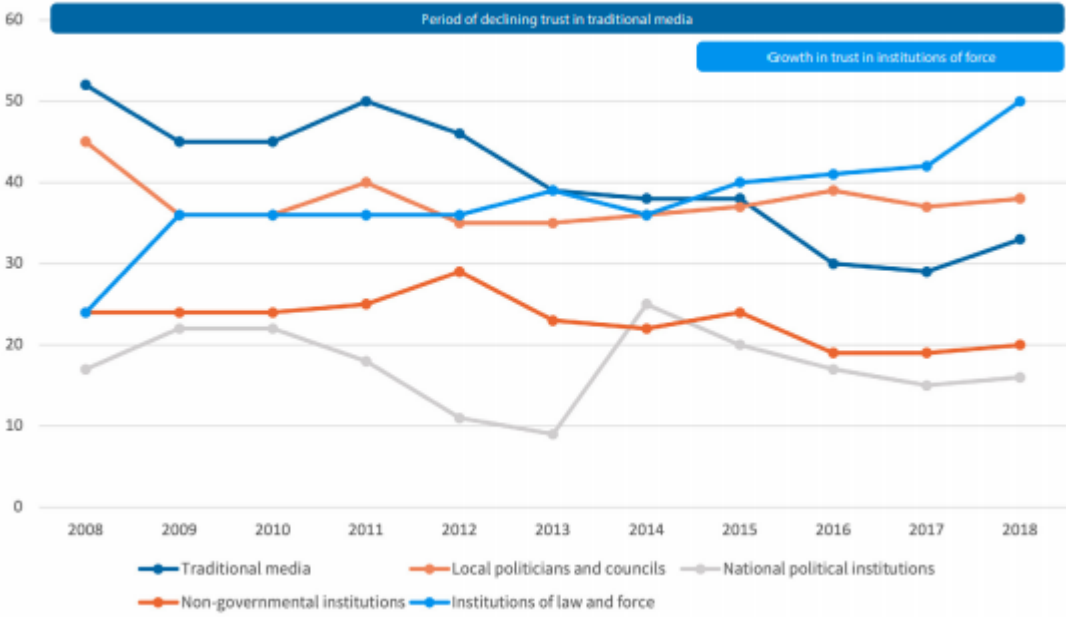
that public officials are corrupt and a positive attitude towards foreigners living in the Czech Republic, as well as war refugees, Roma and other groups.

The secondary analysis made it evident that since 2015 there has been a significant increase in trust in institutions of law and force (the police, army, courts). This growth may be related to the migration crisis and an increasing emphasis on security. Trust in local institutions – such as councils and mayors of towns and cities – has long remained strong. Trust in national political institutions (the government, Chamber of Deputies, Senate) declined long-term until 2013, when there was a turning point (the rise of the ANO party) and the ratio of trusting citizens began rising significantly. In the past few years, distrust in national political institutions has been increasing once again, and the level of trust in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate is in the same range as trust in non-governmental institutions (the study authors included churches and unions in this group along with non-governmental organizations).

People who trust public institutions tend to be more politically active and engaged. The data confirm that Czechs do not have a good understanding of why people associate in and defend their interests through associations and organizations. And thus why “civil society” is important.

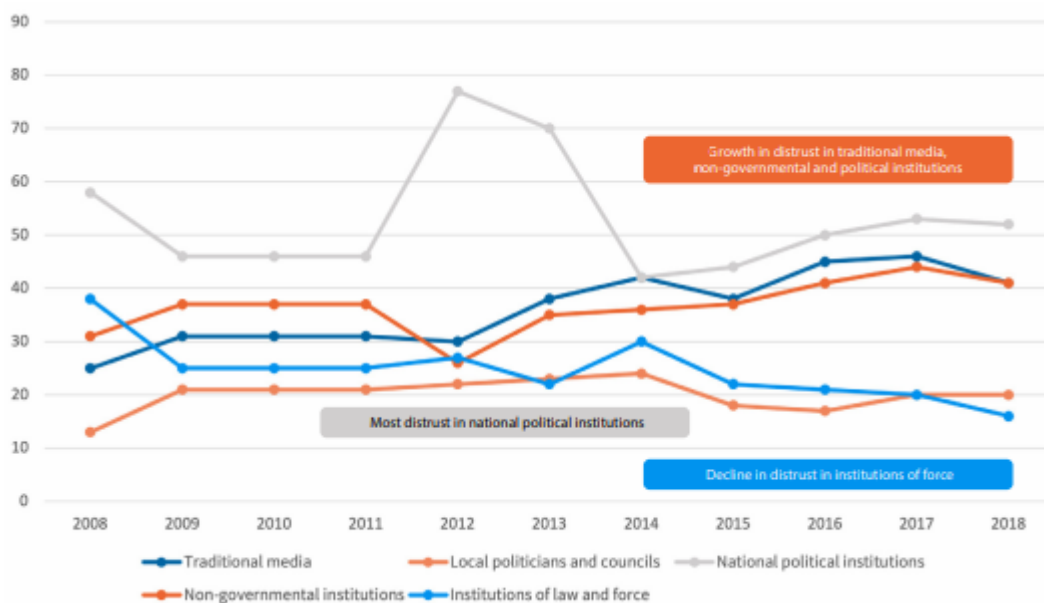
Level of trust in public institutions 2008-2018

Proportion of above-average trusting respondents within types of trust



Level of trust in public institutions 2008-2018

Proportion of respondents with distrust of the mentioned institutions



Source: PAQ Research analyzes from data sources: European Value Survey (EVS) 2018 and CVVM (Our Society) surveys from 2008 to 2018 using factor analysis.

About the survey and the authors

The goal of the research study as a whole was to describe the relationship of contemporary Czech society to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mainly in terms of awareness, trust and attitudes towards various groups of NGOs sorted by their field, size and origin.

The quantitative research study was implemented in October and November 2019 by [PAQ Research](#), a research organization in the field of sociology, in collaboration with [STEM](#), an independent sociology institute. The agency Median collected data for the study in October 2019. The total sample was N=1214 respondents aged 18 to 75. The following sociodemographic characteristic quotas were used in the study: age, gender, education level, size of place of residence, region and intensity of Internet use.

PAQ Research conducted secondary analysis of data from the Public Opinion Research Center's Our Society study covering 2008 to 2018 and the 2018 European Value Survey (EVS). The STEM Centre for Empirical Research developed the quantitative research and public group discussion about non-profit organizations, which preceded the quantitative research section of the study.

The research study was commissioned by the analytical and networking centre [Glopolis](#) on behalf of NeoN, an informal platform for sharing and cooperation among networks of engaged citizens, to obtain information to serve as a basis for self-reflection and improved communication of the organized, mainly advocacy-oriented non-profit sector.

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[1] A regular survey of trust in non-profit organizations is carried out by [the Center for Public Opinion Research](#)