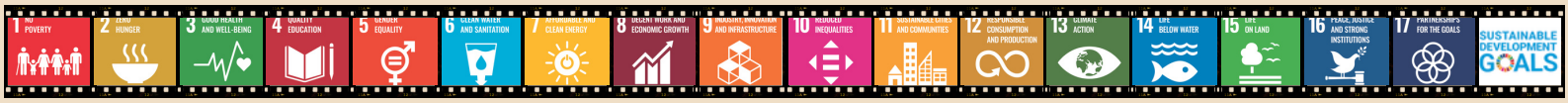

2025 REPORT

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ОБЩЕСТВЕН ДАРИТЕЛСКИ ФОНД СТАРА ЗАГОРА
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ASSESSMENT
OF THE AWARENESS, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA REGARDING THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, WITH A FOCUS ON GOAL 13 – CLIMATE ACTION

2025

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Introduction

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in the implementation of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs**), contributing to raising awareness, shaping policies, and carrying out projects. In Bulgaria, their engagement with **Goal 13 – Climate Action** – is particularly important, as climate challenges are becoming increasingly significant. Through a variety of initiatives, trainings, and advocacy efforts, NGOs work to raise awareness about the need for sustainable solutions, both among the general public and within institutions.

This survey was organized by the **Stara Zagora Community Foundation** as part of the **project "Let's Talk about SDGs"**. Its aim is to assess the awareness, attitudes, and practices of non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria regarding the **SDGs**, with a focus on Goal 13 – Climate Action.

The project is funded by the **C.S. Mott Foundation under the Global Challenges – Local Solutions program, administered by the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland**.

Research Methodology

Survey Tool

The survey was conducted over a period of three months in 2025 using the electronic tool Google Forms, which is designed for easy creation, distribution, and data collection from questionnaires. It is accessible online and suitable for surveying diverse audiences. The tool offers user-friendly templates. Google Forms allows for the use of **closed-ended questions** with "yes/no" answers or multiple-choice options, which are easy to analyze quantitatively and compare across responses—making them a preferred format in sociological research. It also supports **open-ended questions**, enabling respondents to express their opinions freely and without limitations. While the answers to open-ended questions are more difficult to structure, analyze, and process, they provide deeper insights into respondents' motivations, attitudes, and nuances of opinion.

The form also supports multiple-choice questions with more than one selectable option. The tool is convenient thanks to its built-in data automation features. Responses are automatically collected into tables, which can be easily analysed. Key advantages of this electronic tool include security, confidentiality, and, not least, the ease of sharing the questionnaire via social media and email. These features make it particularly suitable for surveying people involved in non-governmental organizations operating in various types of settlements.

Sampling Method

The sample is random. The survey link was distributed via social media and email to the Foundation's mailing list; to publicly available addresses listed on the Information Portal for Non-Governmental Organisations in Bulgaria (https://www.ngobg.info); and through partner organisations. Announcements were also sent via the register of cultural centres[1] and their associations, maintained by the Ministry of Culture, as well as through regional NGO representatives, coordinators, cultural centre associations, and others. A total of 68 responses were received.

Survey Analysis and Results

Introduction to the Questionnaire

The survey begins with a message of appreciation to the participants and a brief explanation of its objective — namely, to assess *"the awareness, attitudes, and practices of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Bulgaria regarding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on Goal 13 – Climate Action."*

The questionnaire introduces the implementing organisation — the Stara Zagora Community Foundation — which is carrying out the project "Let's Talk about SDGs". The initiative is part of a project funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation under the Global Challenges – Local Solutions programme, administered by the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland.

Respondents were informed that the survey takes only a few minutes to complete, is anonymous and voluntary, and that they may choose to stop at any time. The introduction to the questionnaire also states that the results "will be used solely for the purposes of the project and for developing initiatives that support better understanding and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the civil society sector." The introductory section provides all necessary information to build respondents' trust in the survey.

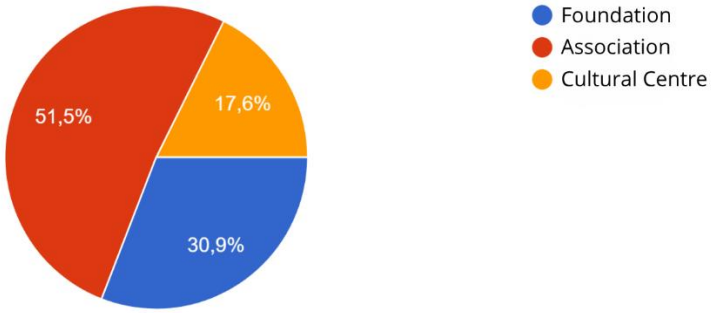
[1] *Cultural centres (in Bulgarian: "chitalishte") are traditional community-based institutions in Bulgaria that combine library services, amateur arts activities, cultural events, and civic education. They are typically non-profit and serve as important local hubs for cultural and educational life, particularly in smaller towns and villages.*

Organisational Profile

The survey begins with six questions aimed at clarifying the type of organisation, its location and years of registration, the respondent's role within the organisation, and other basic information.

Question 1

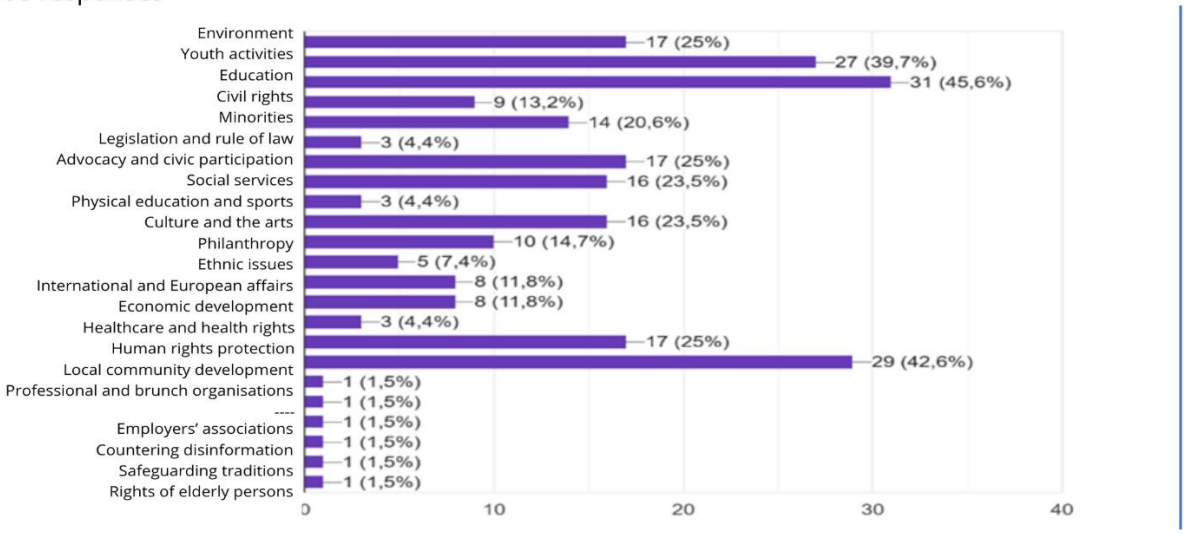
1. What is the legal type of the organisation you are currently involved with?
68 responses



The first question is closed-ended, requiring participants to choose one of three options regarding the type of organisation they represent: association, foundation, or cultural centre. The responses are distributed as follows: 51.5% represent associations, 30.9% represent foundations, and the remaining 17.6% represent cultural centres.

Question 2

2. What are the main areas of activity of your organisation? You may select more than one answer
68 responses



In response to the question about the main areas of activity of the organisations they represent, participants were able to select more than one from a list of predefined fields. The highest percentage of respondents selected the following top three areas:

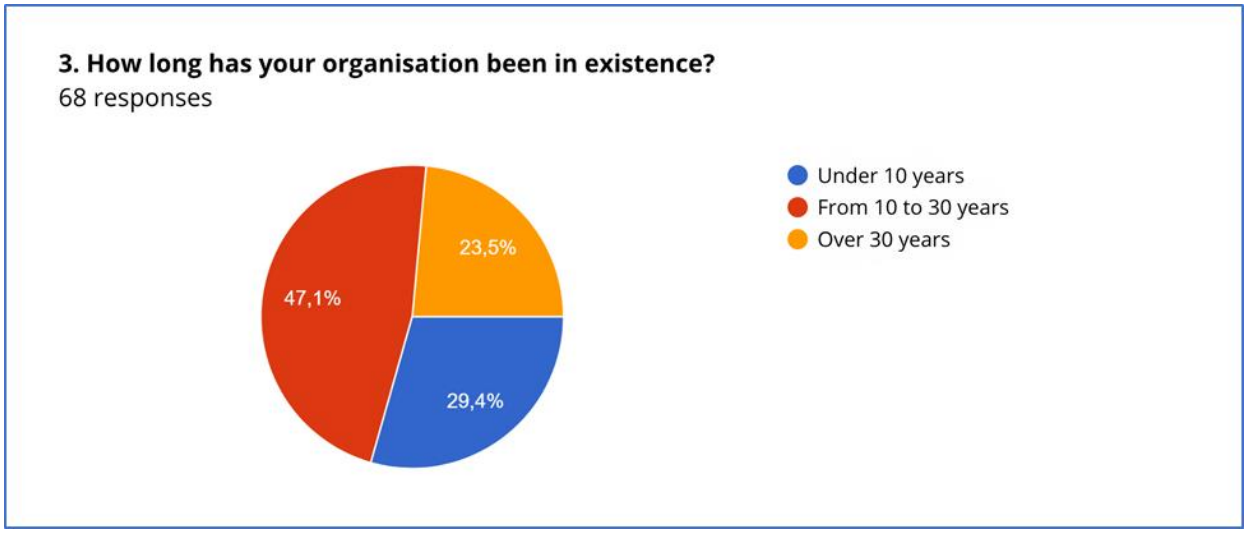
"Education" – 45.6%; "Local community development" – 42.6% and **"Youth activities" – 39.7%**. The fields of **"Environment"**, **"Advocacy and civic rights"**, and **"Human rights protection"** were each selected by exactly 25% of the respondents, followed by **"Social services"** and **"Culture and the arts",** both with **23.5%**.

An interesting additional aspect of the responses is the number of areas each organisation selected. Only 6 organisations chose a single field of activity; 10 organisations selected two; 13 selected three; and 17 indicated four areas. Ten respondents selected five areas, while 12 organisations included six or more. These combinations suggest that more than half of the organisations operate in four or more fields, which may indicate a broader, interdisciplinary approach rather than a narrow specialisation. The most frequently observed combinations of fields are:

1. Youth activities + Education – observed in over 20 responses
2. Education + Local community development – 15 instances
3. Social services + Advocacy and civic participation – 10 instances
4. Minority issues + Human rights protection – 8 instances
5. Environment + Education + Youth activities – more than 7 instances

Question 3

The responses to the question "How long has your organisation been in existence?" show the following distribution: the largest share belongs to organisations that have existed for 10 to 30 years – 47.1%. The next group consists of young organisations existing for less than 10 years – 29.4%. It is reasonable to assume that a portion of the organisations reporting more than 30 years of existence (23.5%) are cultural centres. The high percentage of "young" NGOs, registered within the last decade, suggests that the sector is renewing itself and developing dynamically.



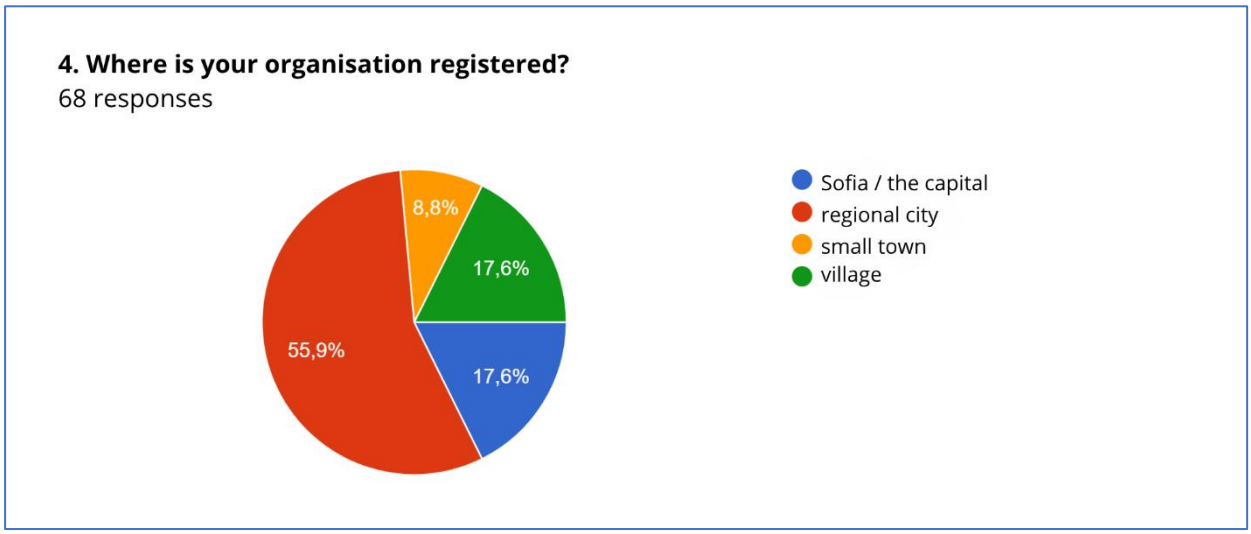
Organisations with a history of under 10 years most frequently work in the areas of youth activities, education, environment, and human rights protection. These organisations tend to be more thematically focused, typically selecting 2 to 4 fields of activity.

Organisations that have existed for 10 to 30 years most often select 4 to 6 areas and work mainly in education, social services, local community development, advocacy and civic participation, minority issues, and human rights.

Organisations with over 30 years of experience are most active in the areas of social services, local community development, culture and the arts, and education, and typically indicate five or more areas of activity.

Question 4

In response to the question regarding the type of settlement in which the organisations are registered, the answers are distributed as follows: 38 organisations are registered in a regional city; 12 organisations in Sofia (the capital); another 12 organisations in villages; and 6 organisations in small towns. It is evident from the responses that over 70% of the organisations are registered either in the capital or in regional cities, which is understandable given the availability of infrastructure, skilled personnel, and access to funding. A total of 18 organisations are registered and operate in small towns and villages. Whether this territorial distribution reflects the actual needs of people living in those areas — and whether there is a need to develop targeted capacity-building programmes specifically for villages and smaller settlements — remains a matter for further, in-depth analysis.

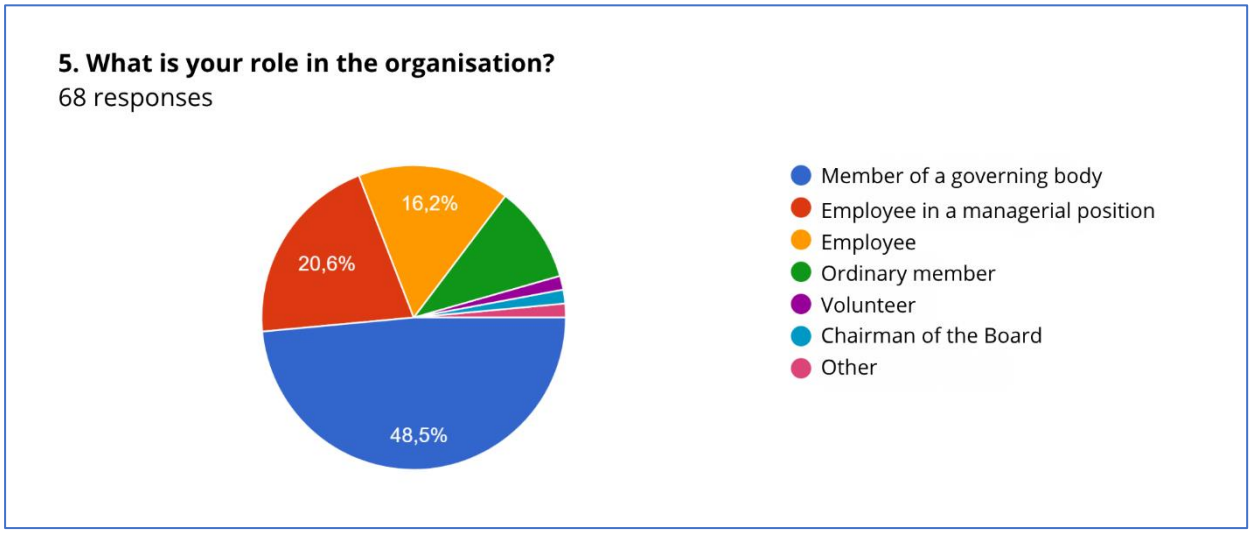


Question 5

The questionnaire was not specifically targeted at the leadership of the organisations, but we wanted to gain insight into the role of each respondent within their respective organisation. In response to the question regarding their position, the answers were distributed as follows:

1. Member of a governing body – 35 people (49.3%)
2. Employee in a managerial position – 13 people (19.2%)
3. Employee (non-managerial) – 10 people (15.1%)
4. Ordinary member – 7 people (9.6%)
5. Volunteer – 1 person
6. Chairperson / Chair of the Board – 2 people

Over two-thirds of the respondents (nearly 70%) hold management or governance roles — either as members of governing bodies or in leadership positions. This suggests that the survey largely reached individuals professionally engaged in the organisation's work, rather than volunteers.



Question 6

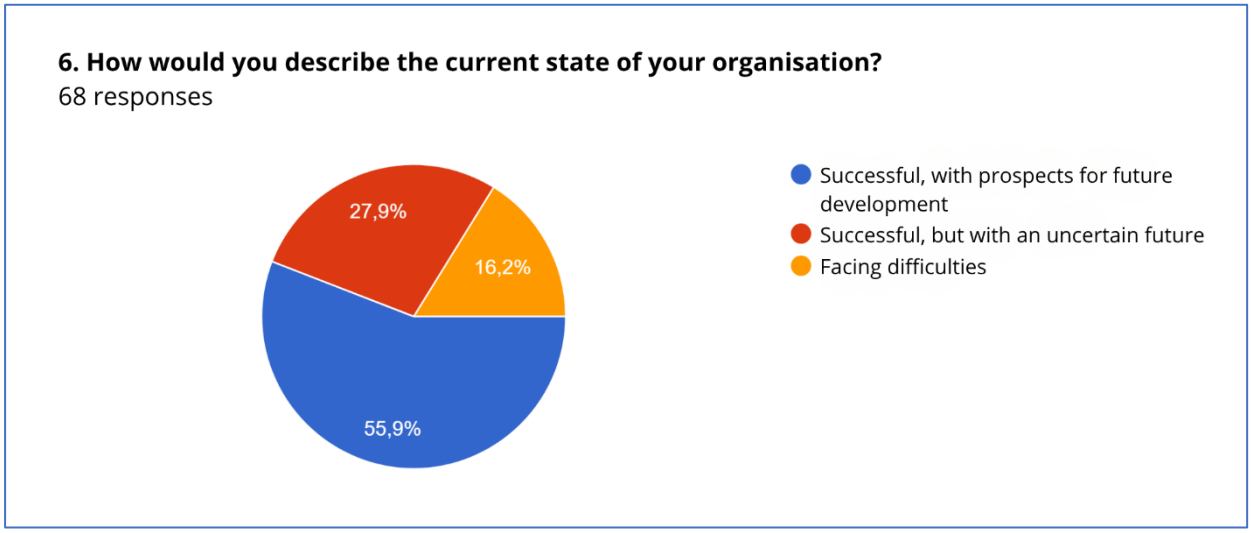
The analysis of the question "How would you describe the current state of your organisation?" reflects the NGO sector's self-assessment in terms of sustainability and future prospects. The key results are as follows:

- "Successful, with prospects for future development" is the dominant answer, selected by 55.9% of respondents. This indicates a high level of confidence and a positive evaluation of both the organisation's current state and its future potential.

- "Successful, but with an uncertain future" was chosen by 27.9%. This group appears stable at present but expresses uncertainty regarding long-term sustainability or access to resources. This may signal funding difficulties, project dependency, or a changing operational environment.

- "Facing difficulties" was the response of 16.2% of organisations, indicating that a portion of NGOs are indeed experiencing serious challenges.

While the majority of respondents view their organisations as stable or even growing, **more than 40% report either uncertainty about the future** or current difficulties. This underscores the need for financial support and/or capacity-building in sustainability, especially in the context of unstable funding and limited resources.

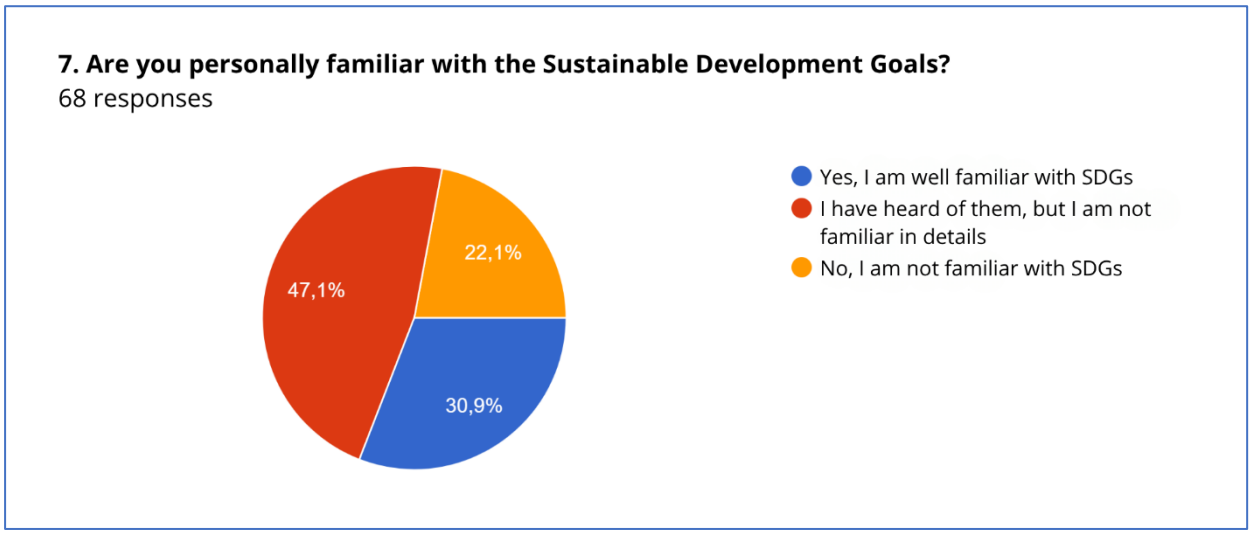


How are the responses to this question distributed when compared to the organisations' years of experience? 50% of organisations registered less than 10 years ago (22 organisations) describe their state as successful with prospects for development, 32% consider the organisation successful but with an uncertain future, and 18% responded that they are facing difficulties. **Nearly one in five of the new NGOs is facing difficulties, and nearly one in three is uncertain about the future, which highlights the fragility during the early years of existence**. Among organisations with 10 to 30 years of experience, 71% selected the answer "successful with prospects", 24% – "successful but with an uncertain future", and 5% – "facing difficulties"; this is the group with the lowest percentage of organisations in difficulty. Organisations with more than 30 years of experience describe themselves as "successful with prospects" in 63% of responses, "successful but with an uncertain future" in 25%, and "facing difficulties" – 12%. **Although experienced, these organisations are not immune to challenges – one in eight is facing difficulties, and one in four is not confident about its future**.

By field of activity, 7 out of 10 organisations active in the field of "education" are stable, and only 8–10% are facing difficulties. 65% of organisations working in youth activities assessed themselves as stable, and 25% as successful but with an uncertain future. **Organisations active in the fields of local community development and social services are among the most stable, with over 70% positive responses**.

Question 7

The next question – “Are you personally familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?” – is the first in a series dedicated to the SDGs. The most common answer, selected by 32 participants (47.17%), is “I have heard of them, but I am not familiar with the details” — suggesting a broad but superficial level of awareness of the SDGs within the sector..



Almost one in three respondents assess their understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals as in-depth – 21 participants or 30.9% state that they are well acquainted with the SDGs. It is also noteworthy that 22.1%, or 15 people, report that they are not familiar with the goals. Based on the responses received, we can summarise that nearly 80% of respondents have heard of the SDGs, but almost half of them do not have in-depth knowledge of the topic.

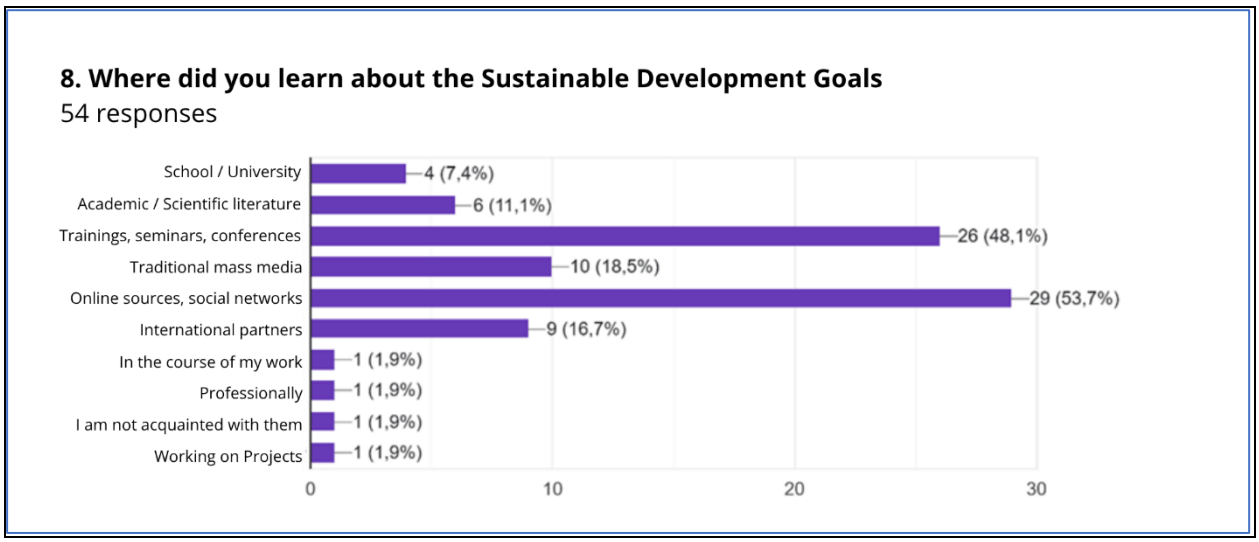
Question 8

In response to the question *“Where did you learn about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?”*, the most frequently cited sources of information (considering that respondents could choose more than one) are as follows:

- **Online sources and social media – mentioned by over 75% of respondents**
- **Trainings, seminars, and conferences – around 60%**
- International partners – over 15%
- Academic/scientific literature – approximately 12%
- School or university – around 8%
- Other sources (including professional experience, project work) – isolated answers

The most common combinations of sources of information on the SDGs are:

1. Online sources and social media + Trainings, seminars, conferences – this is the most frequently observed pairing, reflecting both formal and informal channels of information.
2. Online + Traditional media
3. Online sources + International partners
4. Trainings + Project work / Professional experience



From the responses, we can conclude that information about the SDGs reaches people primarily through informal digital channels and practice-oriented training. However, a significant proportion of participants combine at least two sources of information. This suggests that, in order to deepen the understanding about SDGs, it would be beneficial to invest in content that combines digital accessibility with educational elements.

It is also important to note the low percentage of mentions of traditional media (radio, television, print) in the responses to this question. This leads us to assume that the level of awareness about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals among the broader public — beyond the respondents of this survey — may be even lower.

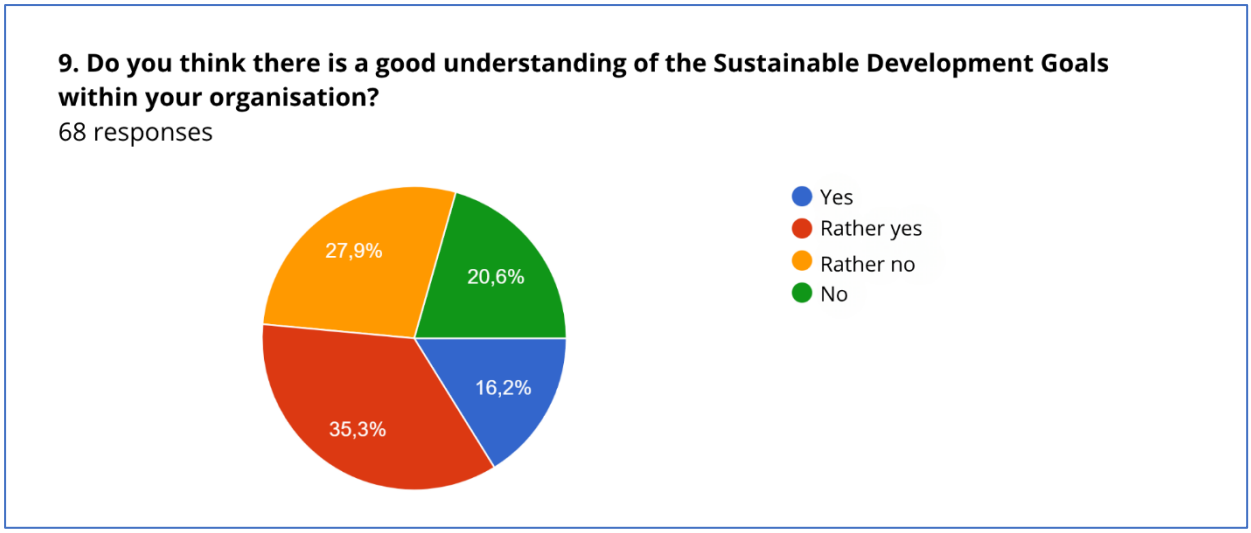
Question 9

The responses to the question “Do you think there is a good understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within your organisation?” are distributed as follows:

- “Yes” – 16.2%
- “Rather yes” – 35.3%
- “Rather no” – 27.9%
- “No” – 14 responses (20.6%)

If we combine the positive responses ("yes" + "rather yes"), we get 51.5%, while the lower levels of understanding ("rather no" + "no") amount to 48.5%. These summarised results show only a slight difference. Just over half of the respondents believe that their organisations have a relatively good or very good understanding of the UN Goals. Nonetheless, this represents a solid foundation for further implementation of the SDGs in practice. The other half of the organisations experience a lack of sufficient knowledge and clarity about the SDGs, which may limit their integration into the organisations' activities or strategic planning.

Although the majority of surveyed organisations declare at least a basic understanding of the SDGs, a significant proportion of NGOs admit that they are not well acquainted with the topic. This highlights the importance of organising additional training sessions, promoting the practical application of the SDGs, and developing accessible, comprehensible, and tailored resources for the civil society sector in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.



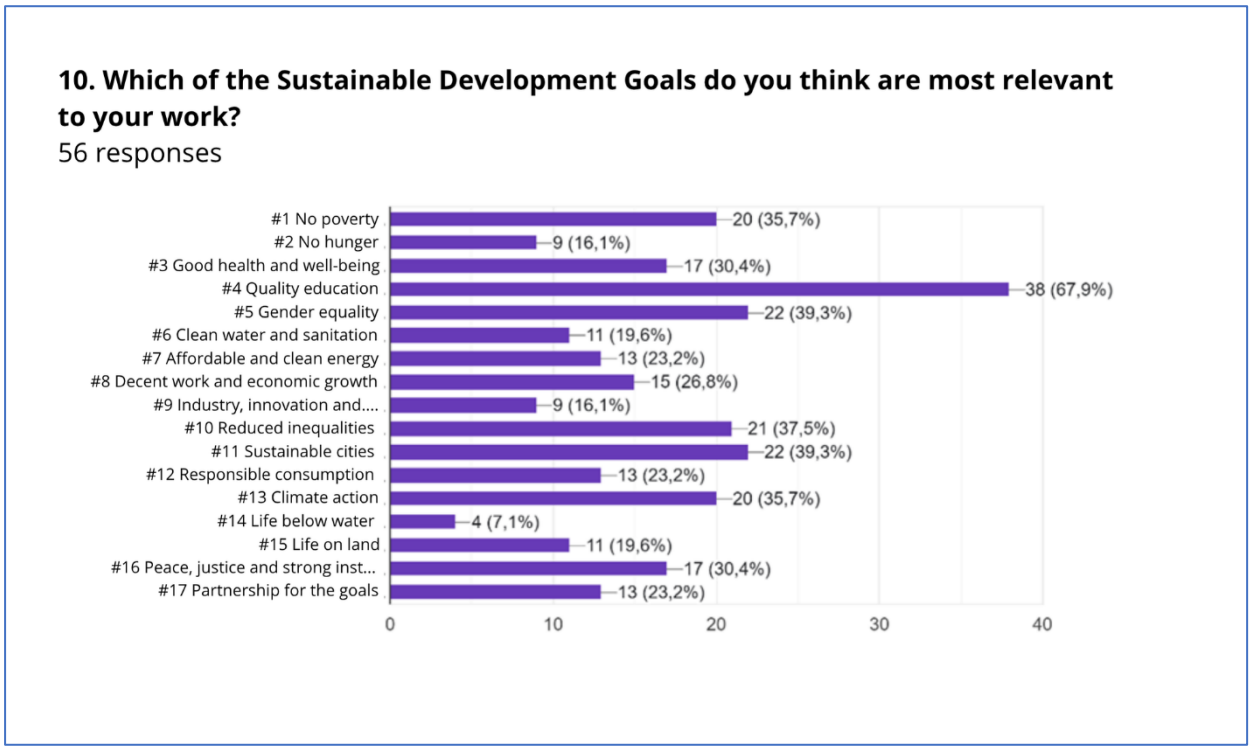
The comparison of the responses to this question with those related to the organisations' areas of activity shows **that a good understanding of the Goals exists among organisations working in the fields of environment, education, and youth activities**. 70% of organisations engaged in environmental protection state that their team has a good or relatively good understanding of the SDGs. This is expected, as many of the Goals are related to climate, sustainability, and environmental issues (e.g. SDGs 13, 14, 15).

In the field of „Education", around 65% of NGOs report a good understanding of the SDGs, and among organisations working in the area of youth activities, 60% demonstrate high awareness.

The fields with lower levels of understanding of the Goals include social services, culture and the arts, and promotion of philanthropy/local development. Observations show that organisations operating in these areas are often involved in actions related to the SDGs, but awareness of their connection to the global framework is not always clearly expressed. **The fields most closely aligned with the environmental and educational aspects of the SDGs show the strongest understanding, suggesting that SDG integration is more successful where the Goals directly overlap with the organisation's mission**.

Question 10

The following questions were not mandatory, in order to avoid causing difficulty for those who stated they were not familiar with the SDGs. In response to the question "Which of the Sustainable Development Goals do you think are most relevant to your work?", 56 participants provided answers, with the option to select more than one goal.



Based on how often they were selected, the Goals are ranked as follows: **Goal #4 Quality Education** – *Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* – was mentioned **38 times**, followed by **Goal #5 Gender Equality** – *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, and **Goal #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities** – *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*, both mentioned **22 times**. Next in the ranking is **Goal #10 Reduced Inequalities** – *Reduce inequality within and among countries*, **selected 21 times**. **Mentioned 20 times** each **were Goal #1 No Poverty** – *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*, and **Goal #13 Climate Action** – *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. **Goal #3 Good Health and Well-being** – *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, and **Goal #16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** – *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable institutions*, were both selected **17 times**. **Goal #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth** – *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*, was mentioned **15 times**. It was followed by **Goal #7 Affordable and Clean Energy** – *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*, **Goal #12 Responsible Consumption and Production** – *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*, and **Goal #17 Partnerships for the Goals** – *Strengthen the*

means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development, each mentioned **13 times** by respondents.

Goal #6 Clean Water and Sanitation – *Ensure access to water and sanitation for all and manage water resources sustainably*, and **Goal #15 Life on Land** – *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, forests, and biodiversity*, were mentioned **11 times** each.

Goal #2 Zero Hunger – *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*, and *Goal #9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation and innovation*, were both mentioned **9 times**.

The least mentioned goal was **Goal #14 Life Below Water** – *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources* – selected **only 4 times**.

We can draw several conclusions based on these results. **Goal #4 Quality Education** stands out clearly as the top priority among the organisations, with 38 mentions. Education is broadly represented in the work of the NGO sector and may be viewed as a foundation for achieving the other Goals.

Following in importance are Goals #5 (gender equality), #11 (sustainable cities and communities), and #10 (reduced inequalities), which reflects the sector's strong focus on social justice, inclusion, and equality, particularly in the context of local and vulnerable groups.

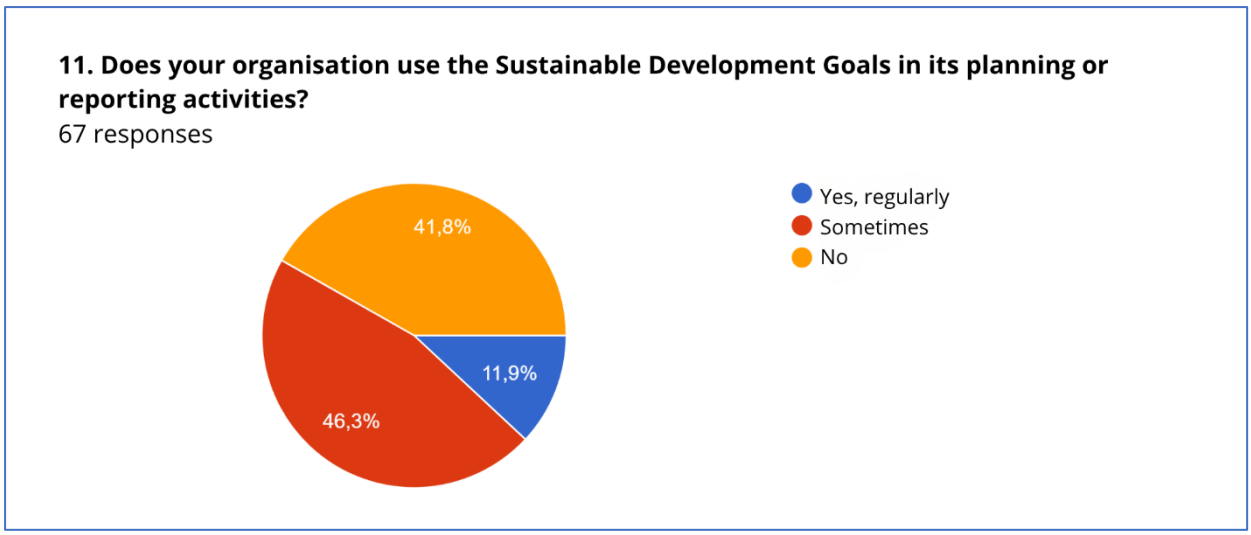
Goal #13 Climate Action is also mentioned relatively often (20 times), indicating growing awareness and engagement with climate-related issues, though it is still not among the leading priorities. The least represented goals are #14 (Life below Water), #9 (Industry and Innovation), and #2 (Zero Hunger), likely due to a lack of direct connection with the activities of the NGOs which decided to take part in the survey sample.

A clear tendency toward social and educational goals is evident, while economic and environmental goals receive comparatively less attention, with some exceptions (e.g. Goal #13). This distribution could be used to identify information gaps, encourage partnerships for achieving less-addressed goals, and guide efforts to strengthen capacity and awareness in areas that NGOs rarely associate with their core mission.

Question 11

Based on the responses provided (a total of 67) to Question 11 "Does your organisation use the Sustainable Development Goals in its planning or reporting activities?", the distribution of answers is shown in the chart. Nearly 12% of the respondents gave a positive answer. "Sometimes" was selected by 46%, and "Never" by 42%.

More than half of the organisations – around 58% – apply the Sustainable Development Goals either systematically or occasionally in their work, which suggests a good or at least moderate level of awareness and willingness to work with them. However, a relatively small percentage of organisations are firmly committed to the Goals and use them systematically in their operations.



The survey, as a snapshot of the current state, shows that despite the NGO sector's activity, a deep connection between the SDGs and internal planning and reporting is still lacking. Without further in-depth research into the causes of this situation, it is difficult to make a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the lack of such connectivity, but recommendations can certainly be made about the need to raise awareness, develop practical guidelines on how to integrate the SDGs into planning and reporting, and explore different ways of providing motivation and incentives from donors or institutions.

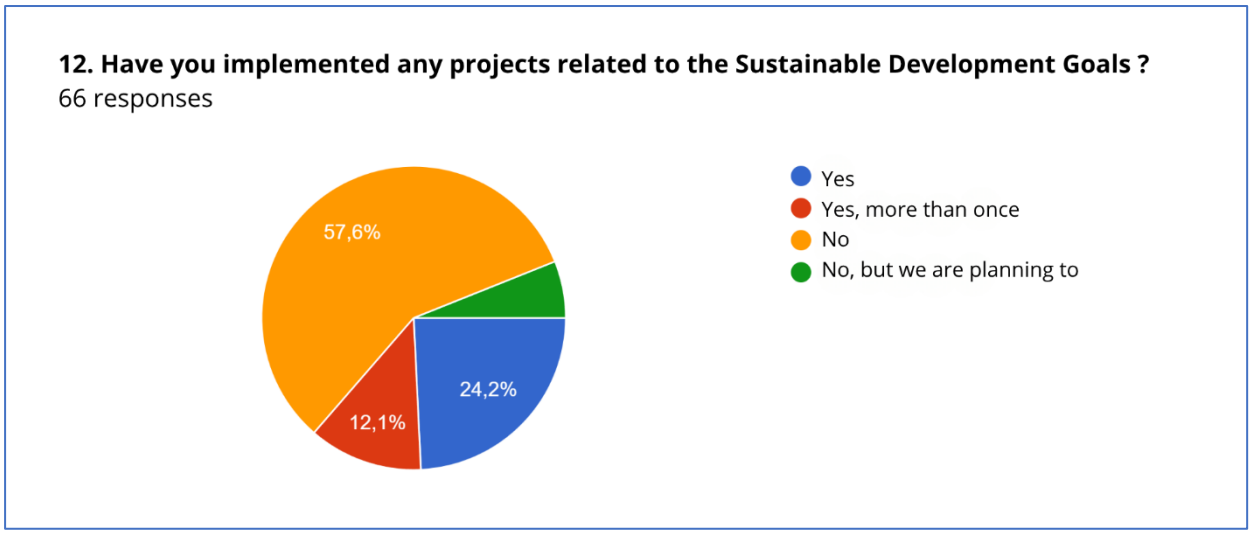
The connection between the use of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in planning/reporting (question 11) and the organisations' field of activity (question 2) shows that organisations working in the fields of education, youth activities, and community development most frequently selected the answers "Sometimes" or "Yes, regularly" to question 11. This suggests that organisations with such a focus and specialisation are more inclined to integrate the SDGs, even if not always in a consistent manner

Organisations working on *environmental issues* also show a relatively high level of SDG inclusion, especially those with international partnerships. However, some smaller environmental organisations with limited capacity fall into the "No" response category. **Among NGOs with a social focus (human rights, minorities, social services), a mixed picture emerges — some actively use the SDGs, while others disregard them. This may be due to various reasons, including the fact that such organisations are often focused on urgent needs and lack the capacity for strategic planning within global frameworks such as the SDGs.**

We can conclude that there is a strong correlation between the field of activity of an organisation and the extent to which it uses the SDGs. Organisations focused on youth activities, environmental issues, and/or educational missions are more open to applying the SDGs, while those oriented towards preserving traditions or with a cultural focus often do not use them — due to lack of information, limited capacity, or an unawareness of their relevance to their work. This highlights the need for specialised training and support to help such organisations understand how the SDGs can also be applicable in a local cultural context.

Question 12

In response to Question 12 – "Have you implemented any projects related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?" – the answers reflect a moderate yet telling level of engagement. Out of a total of 68 organisations, 36% confirmed that they had implemented at least one project, including 12% who reported having carried out more than one, indicating active and purposeful work. On the other hand, 58% stated that they had not implemented such projects, which represents a significant proportion and highlights the lack of information and resources for applying the Goals in the work of these organisations.



Approximately 5% of organisations stated that they intend to begin and are planning to implement such activities, indicating the presence of interest.

These data reveal that the SDGs are perceived as relevant but often remain at the level of intention. Key barriers are likely to include lack of capacity, weak institutional pressure, and **limited funding**. This highlights the need for targeted funding programmes and practical support mechanisms to help organisations transition from declarative commitment to concrete actions aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Question 13

The analysis of responses to Question 13, "What are the main challenges to integrating the SDGs into your organisation's work?", highlights several clearly defined systemic challenges faced by civil society organisations in Bulgaria. The most frequently mentioned barrier is the "lack of resources and time", cited by over 64% of participants. This indicates that even when there is motivation, the lack of human and financial capacity limits the ability to engage in strategic work related to the SDGs.

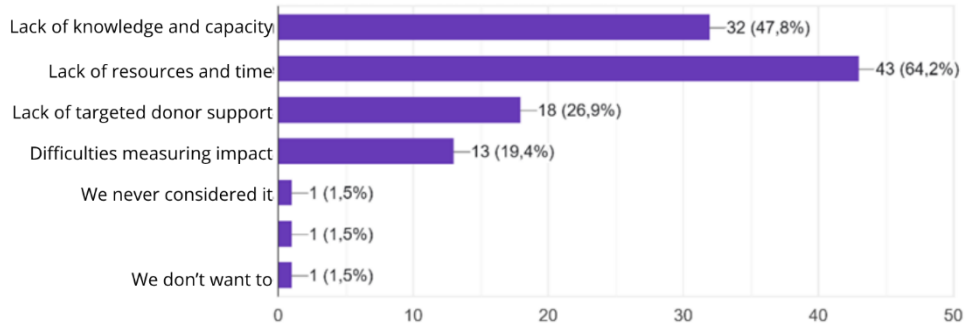
Almost half of the surveyed organisations – 47% – identified "lack of capacity or knowledge" as a barrier, highlighting the need for training, methodological materials, and advisory support.

The third major group of challenges includes the "lack of interest from donors and partners," which indicates that the prioritisation of the SDGs by funding organisations still does not reach many NGOs.

"Difficulty in measuring the impact" is also mentioned relatively often, suggesting that many organisations lack monitoring and evaluation systems in place that align their activities with specific Goals and indicators. **It is also worth noting that one of the responses reflected an explicit rejection of the SDGs as a concept**. Although this is an isolated view, it raises the issue of distrust toward global frameworks within some organization.

The overall picture shows that, despite existing interest, most NGOs face various challenges in the process of integrating the SDGs. This calls for coordinated efforts — both on the part of donors and through public policies and network-based initiatives aimed at building capacity.

13. What are the main challenges to integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into your organisation's work?
67 responses



Question 14

Based on the responses to Question 14, "What type of support would be most beneficial to your organisation in relation to the SDGs?", we can outline a clear picture of the needs of Bulgarian NGOs in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis of 67 responses reveals four distinct priorities that stand out as the most significant for the sector.

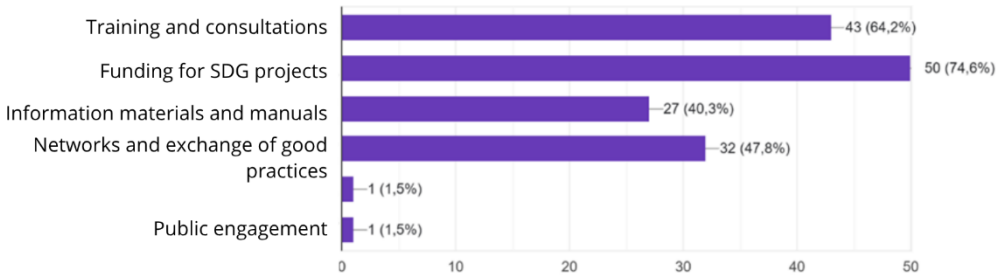
The top and most prominent need identified is "funding for projects related to the SDGs". It appears in the responses of 74.6% of organisations and reflects a chronic lack of resources. Organisations clearly state that without stable financial support, their ideas for contributing to the SDGs remain at the level of intention. This applies both to small local NGOs and to more structured organisations — sustainable funding proves to be a key challenge across the board.

In second place are “training and consultancy services”, mentioned by two-thirds of participants. NGOs are seeking a better understanding of the SDGs themselves, as well as of the mechanisms for their implementation, impact measurement, and the development of effective strategies. The lack of expertise is particularly strongly felt outside the capital and major cities, where opportunities for training are often limited.

The third clear priority is “networking and the exchange of good practices,” mentioned by nearly half of the survey participants — 32 organisations (48%). This type of support is key to increasing awareness, effectiveness, and coordination among organisations working in similar thematic or geographic areas, as well as for the sharing of good practices and expertise. Although platforms do exist, the survey suggests that connections remain fragmented, and collaboration could be much more systematic.

Among the less frequently mentioned, yet significant needs, are “information materials and practical guides,” cited by 40% of respondents.

14. What type of support would be most beneficial to your organisation in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals?
67 responses



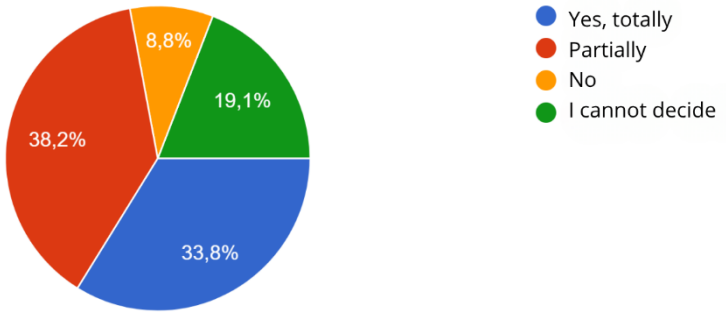
Based on the analysis of responses to Question 14, several targeted recommendations can be formulated to improve support for NGOs in Bulgaria working on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

1. **Flexible and long-term financial mechanisms.** Since funding for SDG-related projects is the most pressing need, it is advisable to establish schemes for long-term financing (not only short-term grants), flexible funds with minimal bureaucracy and simplified application procedures, thematic calls linked to specific SDGs and territories, and so on.
2. **Targeted training and capacity building.** Many organisations report a lack of knowledge on how to apply and measure the SDGs, indicating the need for practical training on integrating the SDGs into organisational strategies; consultations on developing indicators and measuring impact; and mentoring programmes for smaller or newer organisations.

3. **Strengthening network cooperation.** Coordination between organisations remains fragmented. Therefore, it would be useful to establish a national platform for the exchange of good practices; to organise regional meetings and events on the SDGs; and to encourage partnerships between NGOs, local authorities, and businesses.
4. **Development and dissemination of adapted informational materials.** Many NGOs struggle to navigate the complex SDG framework. It would be helpful to develop practical guides featuring cases from Bulgaria; visual and easily accessible materials in Bulgarian; and to translate and adapt international resources to the local context.

Question 15

15. Do you think that climate change is a relevant topic for your organisation's work?
68 responses



The final five questions of the survey **focus on Goal #13 – Climate Action**, with the aim of assessing the level of engagement of non-governmental organisations with the topic. The analysis of responses to Question 15 reveals significant differences in the degree of engagement of the NGO sector with climate change. While more than half of the organisations state that the topic is either fully (33.8%) or partially (38.2%) relevant, only about one third of all respondents consider it fully relevant. This suggests that climate change is more often perceived as a secondary or additional focus rather than a central topic of work for the majority of respondents.

The group stating that they cannot decide is also significant – 19%, or nearly one in five organisations. This signals a lack of clarity about how the topic of climate change fits into their specific field of activity, particularly among organisations focused on culture, social services, or human rights.

At the other end of the spectrum are NGOs that clearly declare "Yes, absolutely" — primarily those working in areas such as the environment, sustainable development, or education on the topic of SDGs. The share of "No" responses is also not negligible — nearly 9%, suggesting that some organisations view climate change as entirely unrelated or inapplicable to their field of activity.

The data suggests that despite the growing global importance of the climate agenda, many NGOs in Bulgaria still do not recognise it as a structural component of their work. This opens up opportunities for training, cross-sector partnerships, and consultations that can help make the topic more recognisable, applicable, and connected to the organisations' actual activities.

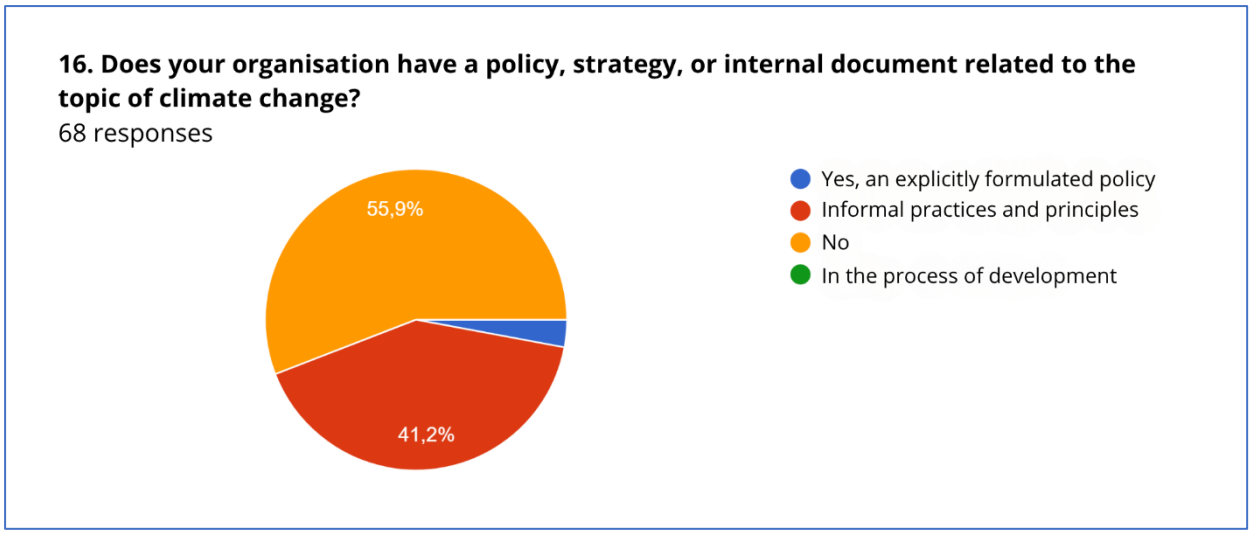
While approximately 34% of all organisations consider the topic to be "fully relevant," among the cultural centres this share is lower – only about 20%. The majority of cultural centres perceive the topic as partially related to their activities, which aligns with the main trend in the broader sample, but to a larger extent. The responses "cannot decide" and "no" are also more common among cultural centres compared to other types of organisations, especially when they have indicated that their work is cultural, folkloric, or educational, without a direct environmental focus.

The cultural centres are less likely to see climate change as directly relevant to their mission, which is understandable given their focus on culture, education, and the local community. Nevertheless, many of them acknowledge a potential connection ("partially"), which opens up opportunities for integrating the climate topic through educational campaigns, community events, and other initiatives.

To activate this potential, it would be useful to develop models and practical guides that demonstrate how cultural centres can serve as a bridge between culture and sustainability

Question 16

The analysis of Question 16, "Does your organisation have a policy, strategy, or internal document related to the topic of climate change?", shows that the majority of the responding NGOs do not have an official strategy or policy related to climate change.



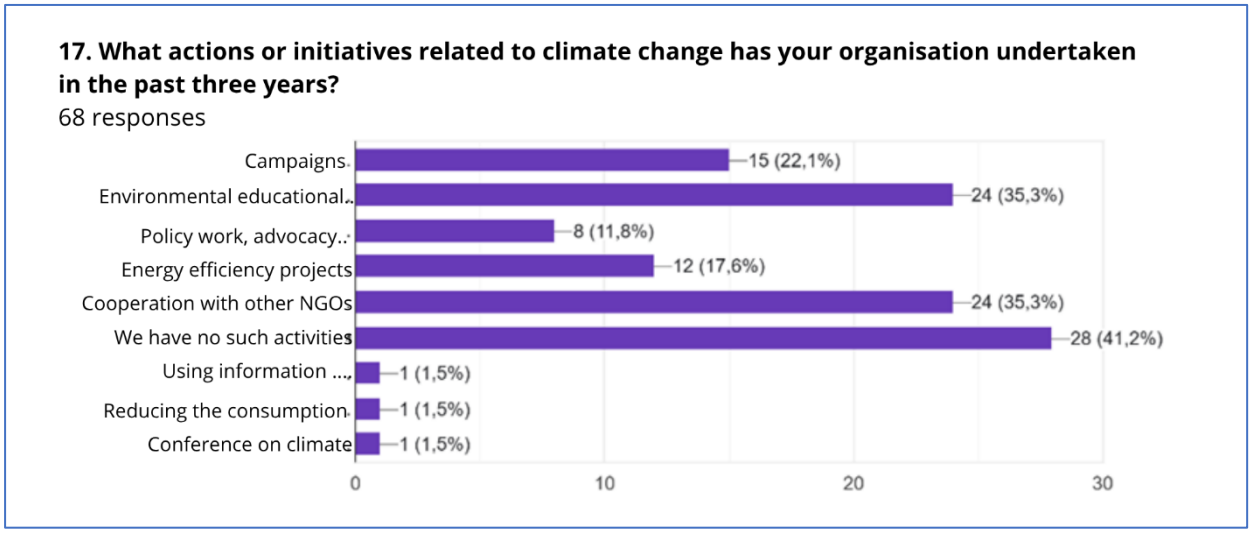
Over 40% of organisations indicated that they apply “informal practices and principles,” while around 56% responded that they do not have any document or organisational policy on the topic. Only two organisations stated that they have an “explicitly formulated policy” on climate change.

The responses clearly show that the topic of climate change is present at a practical level but not at a strategic one. Many NGOs appear to recognise its importance and take occasional action, but without institutionalising it. The absence of official documents indicates that climate change is often left outside the core goals and organisational strategies of the NGO sector. The “informal practices” responses likely cover a variety of activities, but in the absence of a formal policy, these efforts are often unsystematic and difficult to measure.

Only a few organisations make a conscious effort to integrate climate resilience into their policies and official documents, suggesting a need for more targeted resources, training, informational materials, and other forms of support. In conclusion, while there is some level of engagement with the topic, it is rarely elevated to a strategic level. This limits the effectiveness of actions and the potential for funding. Support for the development of internal policies and frameworks could significantly strengthen the sector’s climate engagement.

Question 17

The analysis of Question 17, “What actions or initiatives related to climate change has your organisation undertaken in the past three years?”, shows that although climate-related issues are still not a central priority for most respondents, a significant proportion of them have taken concrete actions over the past three years.



Around half of the organisations, however, stated that they have not undertaken any activities related to climate change. This confirms the trend already observed in previous questions: for many organisations, the topic is perceived as peripheral or is still in the process of finding its place within their mission and field of work. This is particularly common among organisations working in the fields of culture and the preservation of traditions.

Among the remaining organisations, however, several clear areas of activity stand out. "Environmental educational activities" and "collaboration with other organisations on the topic" are the most frequently mentioned types of initiatives, indicating that NGOs are using their expertise and networks to raise awareness among various groups — youth, teachers, and local communities. Awareness-raising campaigns, although mentioned less frequently than the first two, were still noted by one in five organisations. Projects related to energy efficiency and sustainable consumption were reported as concrete actions and initiatives by 17.6% of respondents, followed by "policy work and advocacy" mentioned by nearly 12%.

In summary, although the majority of NGOs still do not engage in climate-related activities, those that do focus primarily on areas aligned with their capacity: education, partnerships, and awareness-raising. This presents opportunities for developing practices aimed at structuring efforts, ensuring sustainable resource support, and expanding target groups.

Question 18

The analysis of Question 18 highlights the key barriers preventing NGOs in Bulgaria from engaging more actively with the topic of climate change. There is a systemic lack of capacity, strategic vision, and institutional incentives needed to make this issue a sustainable priority.

The main obstacles identified are:

1. Lack of capacity or knowledge – the most frequently cited barrier, is mentioned in 55.9% of the responses. Organisations lack the necessary expertise on the topic, and often do not have staff who can develop it further. The voluntary nature of activities and limited administrative resources in some organisations further deepen the problem.
2. The topic is not a priority for funding organisations. Around one third of respondents noted that climate-related issues are not systematically supported by donors. This discourages organisations from investing effort, especially when they are already operating with limited resources
3. We do not consider this to be part of our mission. Approximately 25% of responses indicate a perceived discord between climate change and the organisation's core activities (e.g. culture, social services). This highlights the need for tailored approaches for different types of organisations
4. There is no interest among the people that we work with. This obstacle is noted by nearly 14% of respondents — a sign that climate-related topics are not prioritised by the communities with which NGOs work. This also highlights the need for communication support and increased awareness at the local level.

The responses show that capacity is at the core of whether climate change becomes part of an organisation's work. Training, accessible resources, and mentoring support are needed, especially for small and regional NGOs. A shift in funding priorities could help integrate climate resilience into more grant schemes, including those for NGOs outside the environmental sector.

In terms of organisation type and field of activity, the responses to Question 18 reveal certain patterns. Among the different types, **cultural centres** are the organisations most frequently citing "lack of capacity or knowledge," in some cases combined with "lack of interest within the community." Another commonly mentioned barrier among them is "not part of our mission," while "lack of donor support" is rarely noted. This may reflect a generally lower level of engagement with project-based funding.

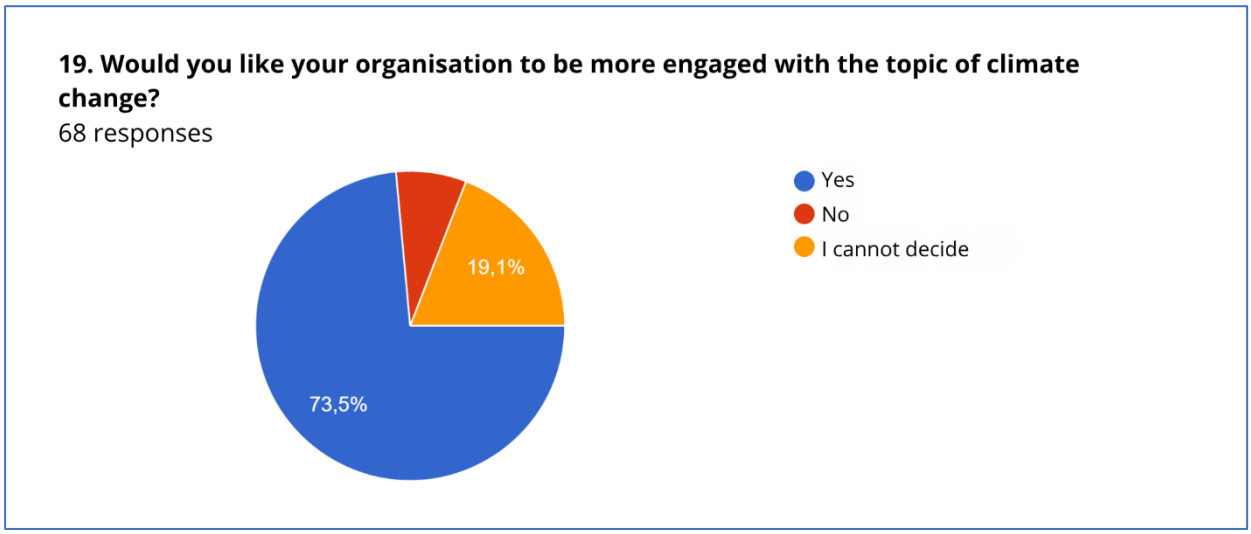
Among **associations** and **foundations**, the most common responses are "lack of capacity," often combined with "lack of interest from funding organisations." These organisations are more likely to recognise the potential of the topic, but "the lack of expertise and funding holds them back," with some also mentioning the challenge of competing priorities as an additional barrier.

By field of activity, organisations working in the area of "environment and sustainable development," although more engaged with the topic, identify "lack of capacity" and "limited access to funding" as their main obstacles. For organisations active in the field of culture, the most frequently mentioned barriers are "not part of our mission" and "lack of interest among the target group." Organisations working **in social services and with vulnerable groups**, similar to cultural centres, view the challenges as stemming from a lack of capacity and being overburdened with core activities, leaving the topic on the periphery.

We can summarise that the lack of capacity is a universal barrier, regardless of the type of organisation or its field of activity. The topic of climate change is often perceived as "external" to the organisation's mission, especially in the cultural sector. Funding donors are not widely recognised as a source of support, particularly among cultural centres and smaller NGOs.

Question 19

The analysis of responses to Question 19, “Would you like your organisation to be more engaged with the topic of climate change?”, shows a high level of expressed interest in future involvement, despite the fact that in previous questions many respondents indicated a lack of capacity, resources, or clarity.



“Yes” was selected by 73.5% of organisations, indicating a clear willingness to become more actively involved in the topic. This suggests that despite existing barriers (such as lack of knowledge, funding, or connection to their mission), they recognise the importance of climate change and aspire to be part of the solution. The answer “Cannot decide” was chosen by approximately 20%. This group reflects uncertainty and likely includes organisations that are not fully familiar with the topic or do not yet see a direct link to their work. It represents a potential focus for educational and other appropriate interventions. The answer “No” was selected by about 5%, which is a relatively small share.

Conclusion

The survey conducted among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Bulgaria highlights important trends regarding their awareness, attitudes, and practices related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on Goal 13 – Climate Action. The data show that despite the generally positive attitude toward the SDGs, their systematic integration into the strategic documents and activities of the organisations remains limited.

More than half of the surveyed NGOs are familiar with the Goals to some extent and show interest in their implementation, with approximately one third having already carried out specific projects in this area. In terms of thematic focus, there is clear interest in educational, social, and environmental issues, with Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and

Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) identified as the most relevant to their current activities.

Nevertheless, Goal 13 remains in the background — the topic of climate change is often perceived as secondary or difficult to integrate, particularly by organisations working in the fields of culture, the arts, and social services.

The main difficulties identified by the surveyed NGOs include a lack of resources, expertise, strategic vision, and support from funding institutions. These point to the need for additional training, consultancy, access to adapted materials, and opportunities for partnerships and the exchange of good practices. The absence of official internal policies or strategies on climate-related issues highlights the need for comprehensive capacity-building support within the sector.

Despite these challenges, the current study clearly demonstrates a stated willingness among a significant share of NGOs to expand their engagement with the climate agenda. This presents a real opportunity for the development of joint initiatives, training, network-building, and the promotion of institutional recognition and support that can facilitate the process of meaningful integration into the Sustainable Development Goals.