

# CSO ASSESSMENT SURVEY

*Digital PACT Lebanon - Digital Platform for Accountability & Citizen-centered Transformation in Lebanon*

*19 July 2021*



*A SIREN ANALYTICS POLICY BRIEF  
July 2021*

# BACKGROUND

*Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a major role in Lebanon, and their importance has significantly increased with the devastating consequences of the Beirut Blast from August 4 and the multi-level crisis that is ripping through the country and endangering the livelihoods of an entire population. Based on this crucial standpoint, it is important to assess the needs of CSOs in Lebanon in terms of digital and technological readiness so they can further accomplish their goals.*

- Siren Analytics and ANND have set up a partnership in order to enhance a “Digital PACT” for Lebanon, in order to generate a “Digital Platform for Accountability & Citizen-centered Transformation in Lebanon”.
- The objectives of the project are two fold:
  - ✓ Better empower the CSOs in Lebanon with digital and modern technology in order to perform ad key agents in reform implementation;
  - ✓ Better enable digital networks for real-time monitoring and evidence-based dialogue between CSOs, government, development partners and local communities.
- The project was further discussed during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on Tuesday 13 July with a number of NGO representatives.
- During the recent period, a survey was conducted with CSOs established in Lebanon, gathering **114 respondents**, in order to assess their digital readiness in terms of capacity-building, awareness campaigns and monitoring tools.
- This policy brief aims at offering some leads based on the actual situation and needs of the CSOs in the field in order to empower digital capacity building in the areas of advocacy and monitoring.

# METHODOLOGY

*A preliminary survey was carried out by Siren Analytics between 17 June and 16 July 2021 based on a questionnaire looking at three main organizational areas: planning & procurement, technological & digital readiness, advocacy & monitoring capabilities.*

- Between **17 June and 16 July**, Siren Analytics surveyors have been contacting a list of 450 CSOs from all areas of expertise, including academic circles involved in awareness and capacity-building programs.
- CSOs representatives filled the form online directly as they were contacted by email, phones and WhatsApp in order to follow-up with those organizations interested in participating in the survey. They were sometimes supported directly by the surveyors to complete the form online.
- In the given period, **114** CSOs were responsive and completed the survey, which data was securely and confidentially collected in order to produce this policy brief. They are not representative of the CSOs scope in Lebanon, but are diverse enough to offer a perspective on how many view their organizational and digital readiness.
- A FGD gathering 8 CSOs representatives was held at Siren Analytics office in Beirut to discuss the idea of this “Digital PACT” and listen to potential challenges and limitations.

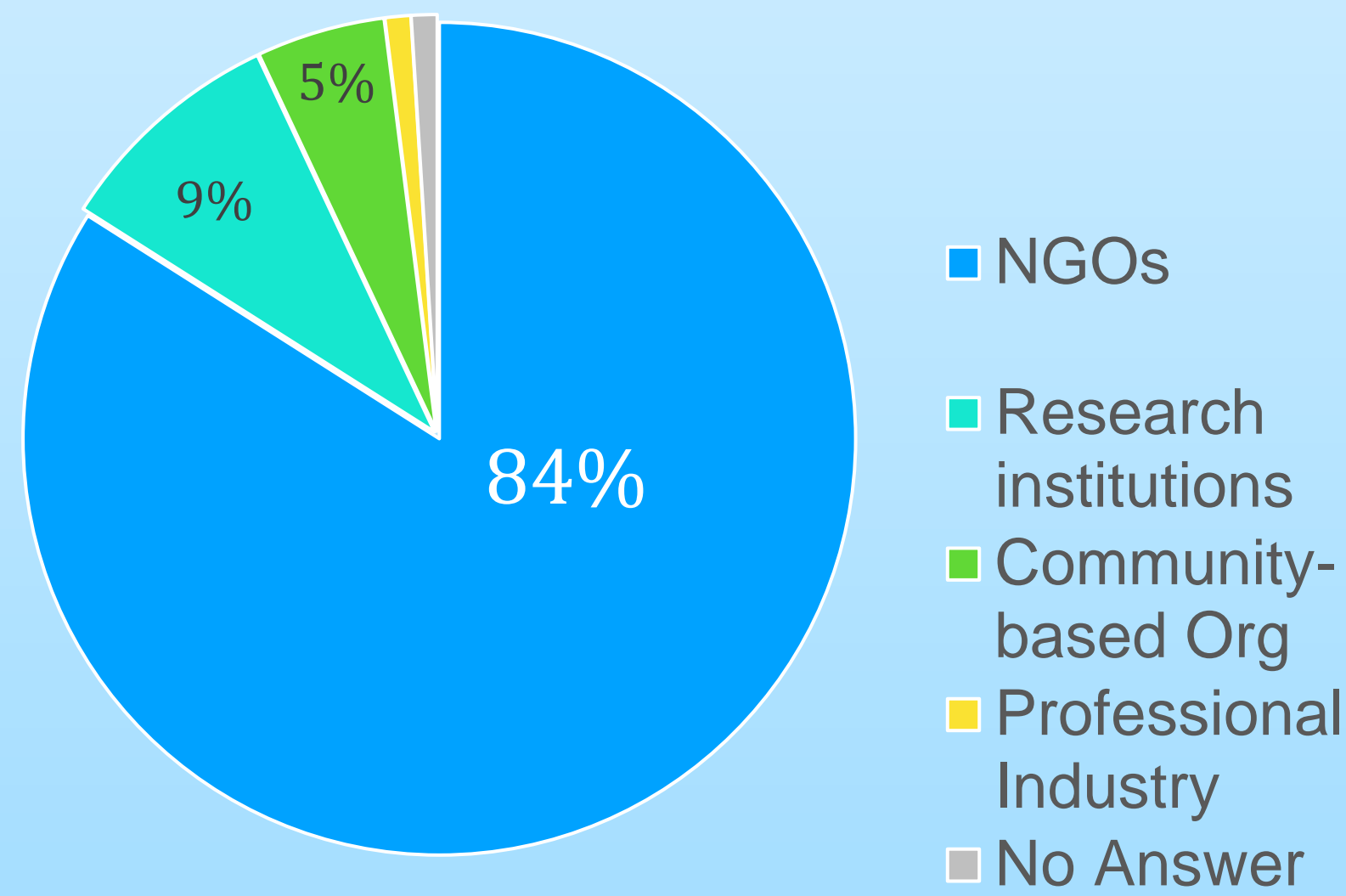


# SAMPLE PROFILE

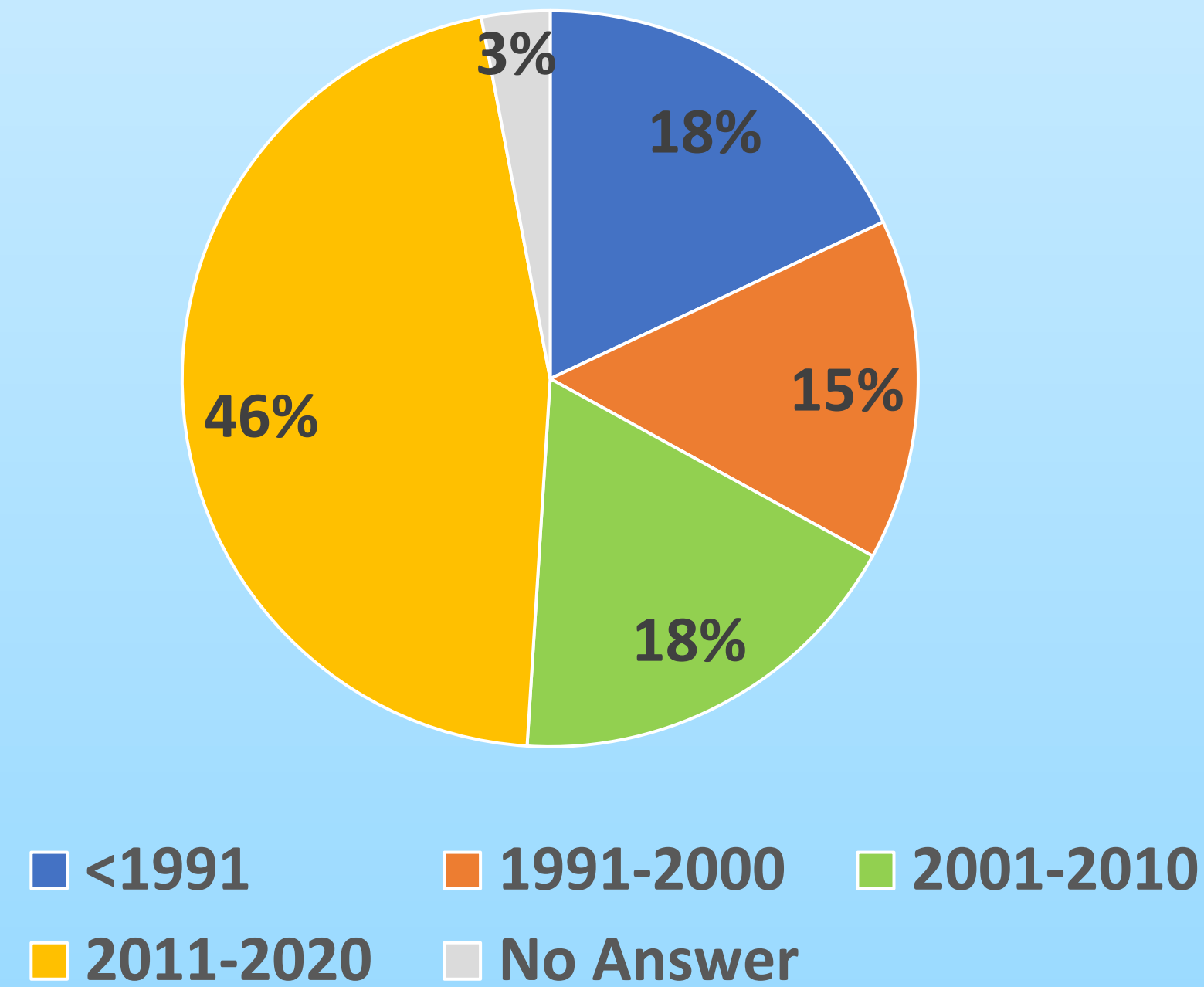
*Respondents are mostly NGOs from various sizes, age and budgets, showing real diversity in the survey's sample despite its non representativity of the Lebanese overall civil society.*

- Respondent CSOs are mainly NGOs (**84%**), with a smaller group forming Research entities (**9%**) and Community-based groups (**5%**).
- A sizable group of CSOs appear of recent creation (**46%** were established between 2011 and 2020), during the decade of the Syrian crisis. **15%** are much older entities which establishment goes back prior to 1991.
- **31%** of respondents form large organizations with prominent budgets of over 500,000 USD, while **44%** of CSOs work with annual budgets under 50,000USD (**25%** with less than 15,000USD),
- Yet in terms of staff, **48%** state their work with less than 10 full time employees and roughly the same ratio (**51%**) relies on less than 10 part-time employees. **9% of respondents have no employees whatsoever.**
- Actually, most respondents (**88%**) actually depend more on volunteers, with **37%** can count on a range of 10 to 49 volunteers, while **32%** have more than 50 volunteers enrolled in their activities.

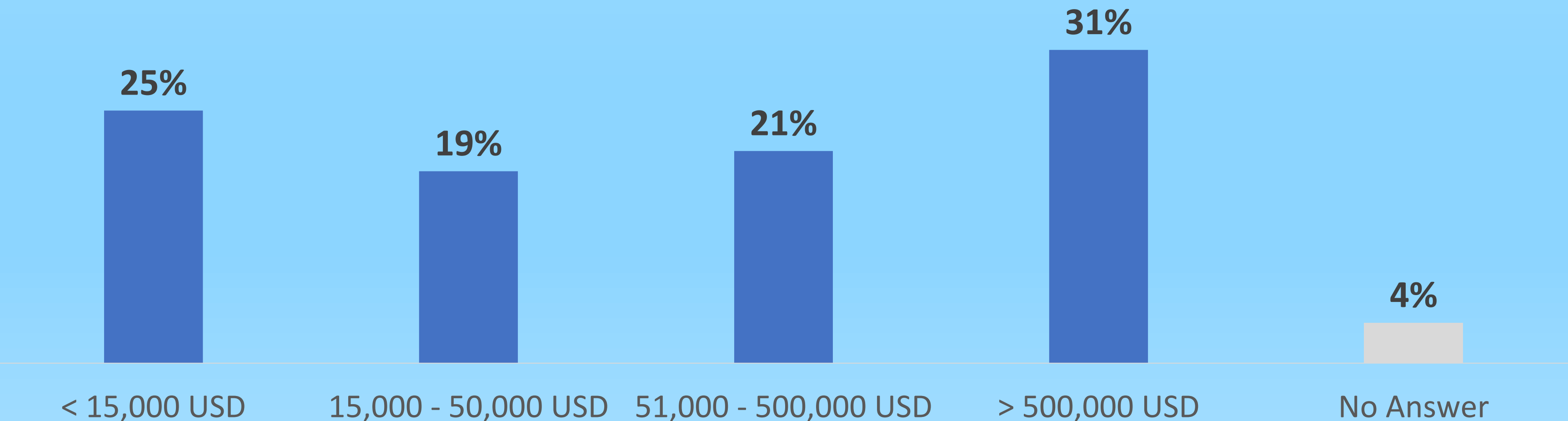
Type of Civil Society Organizations



In what year did your organization start working?



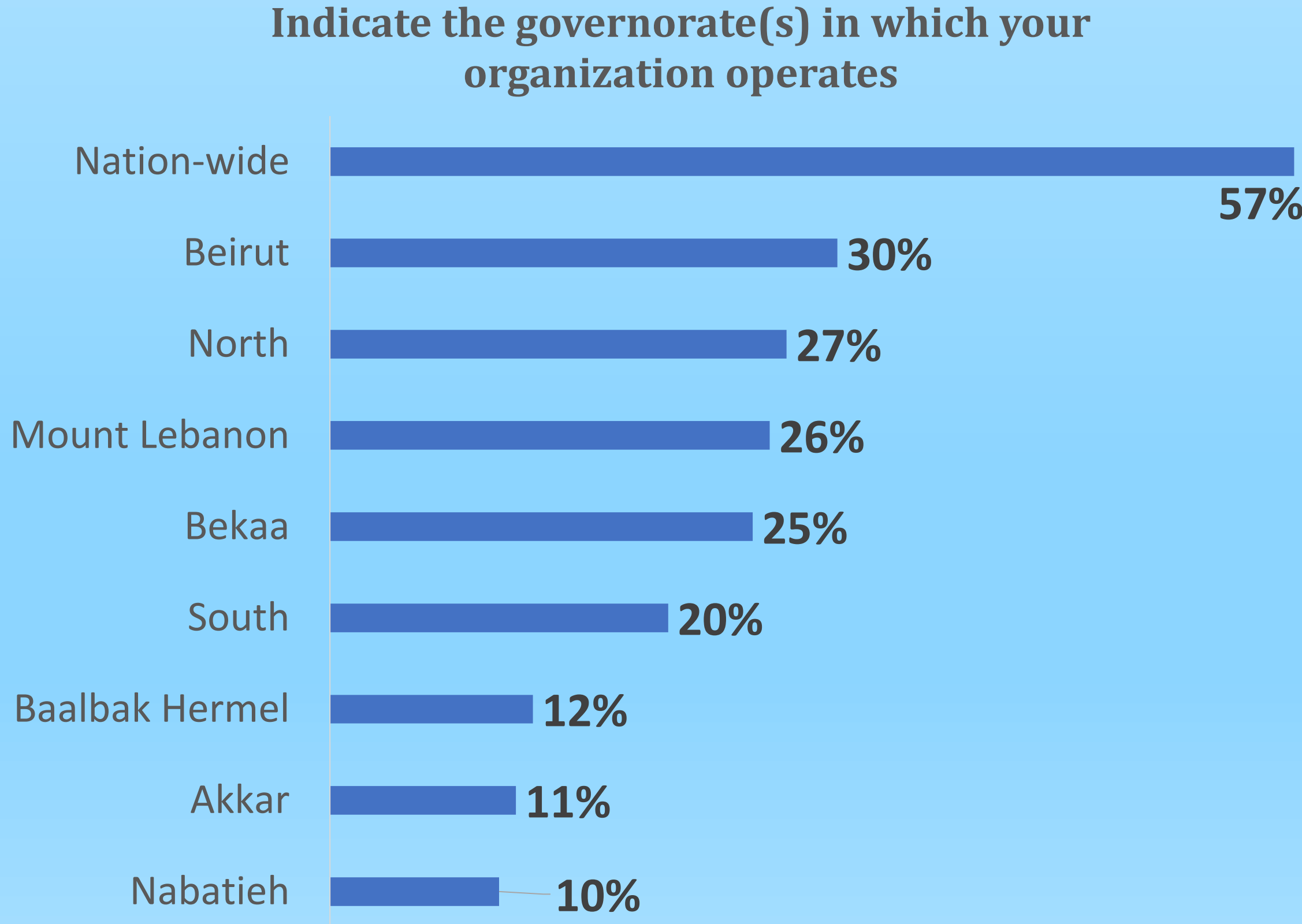
What's your average yearly budget?



# SAMPLE PROFILE

Respondents cover services in relation to Community support, Service Provision, Advocacy & Campaigning. A majority operates nation-wide, while regions such as Nabatieh, Baalbak-Hermel and Akkar have a much lower concentration of activities.

- A majority of CSOs manage to have a nationwide coverage, with much less concentration in regions such as Baalbak-Hermel (12%), Akkar (11%) and Nabatieh (10%).
- Most work on “Community support” (64%), but also in Service Provision (63%) and “Advocacy and Campaigning” (57%). 50% are involved in humanitarian relief.



**57%**  
of CSOs are  
active Nation-  
wide

**50%**  
of CSOs work  
in Emergency  
Relief

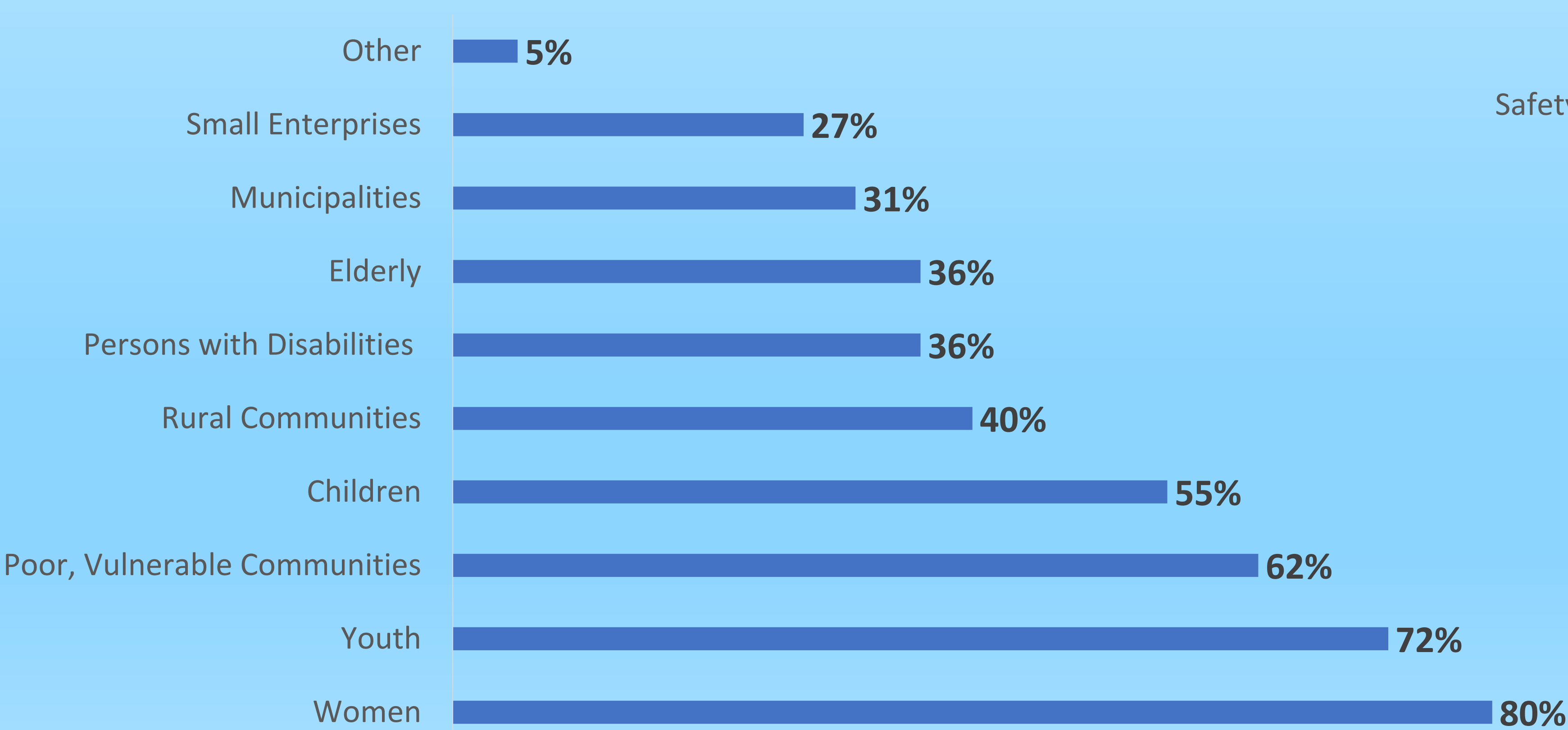


# SAMPLE PROFILE

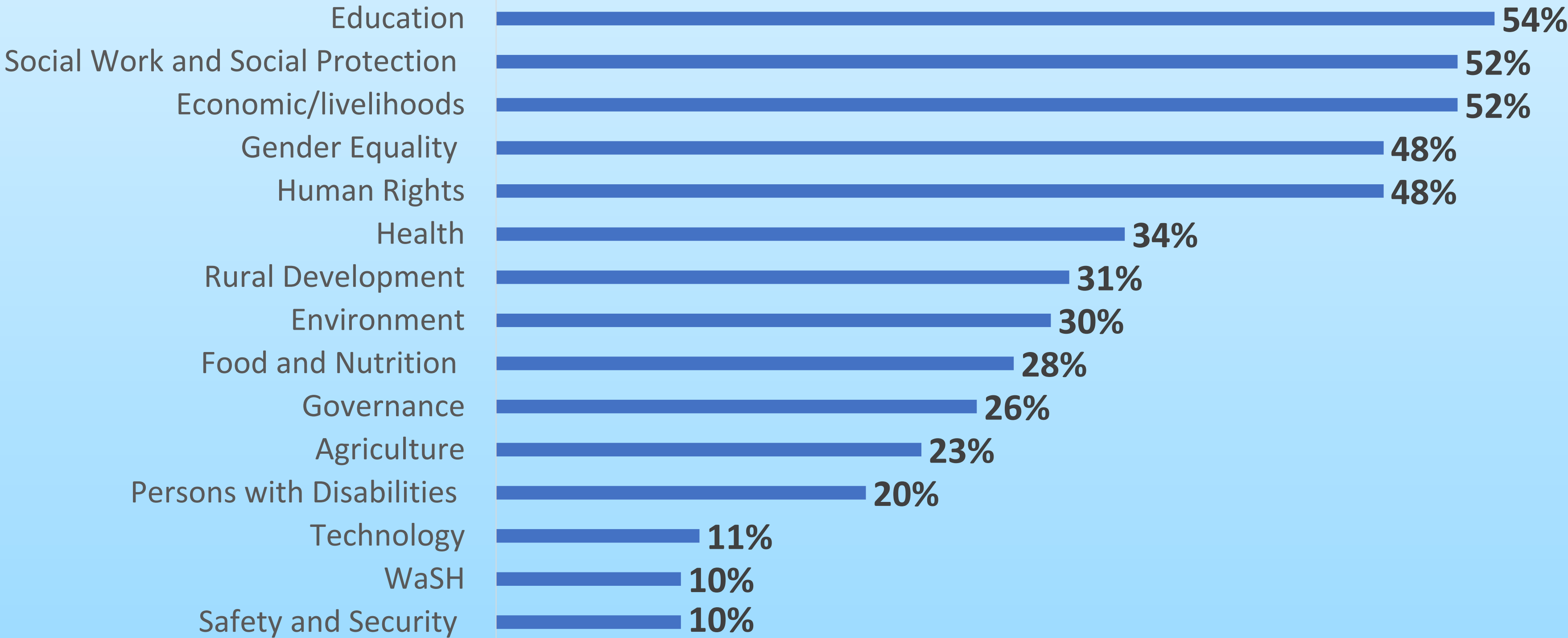
*Respondents mainly intervene on issues pertaining to Education, Social Protection, Livelihoods and Gender equality, in addition to Human Rights. Target beneficiaries are mainly women and youth, with prominent focus on poor and vulnerable communities.*

- A majority of CSOs are active in the fields of Education (54%), social protection and livelihoods (52%), with similarly large involvement on gender equality and human rights (48%). With the deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions in the country in the past decade, these are among the main concerns of the Lebanese population. In the short future, the share of Food and Health sectors are expected to significantly increase.

Who are your target beneficiaries?



What are your areas of expertise?

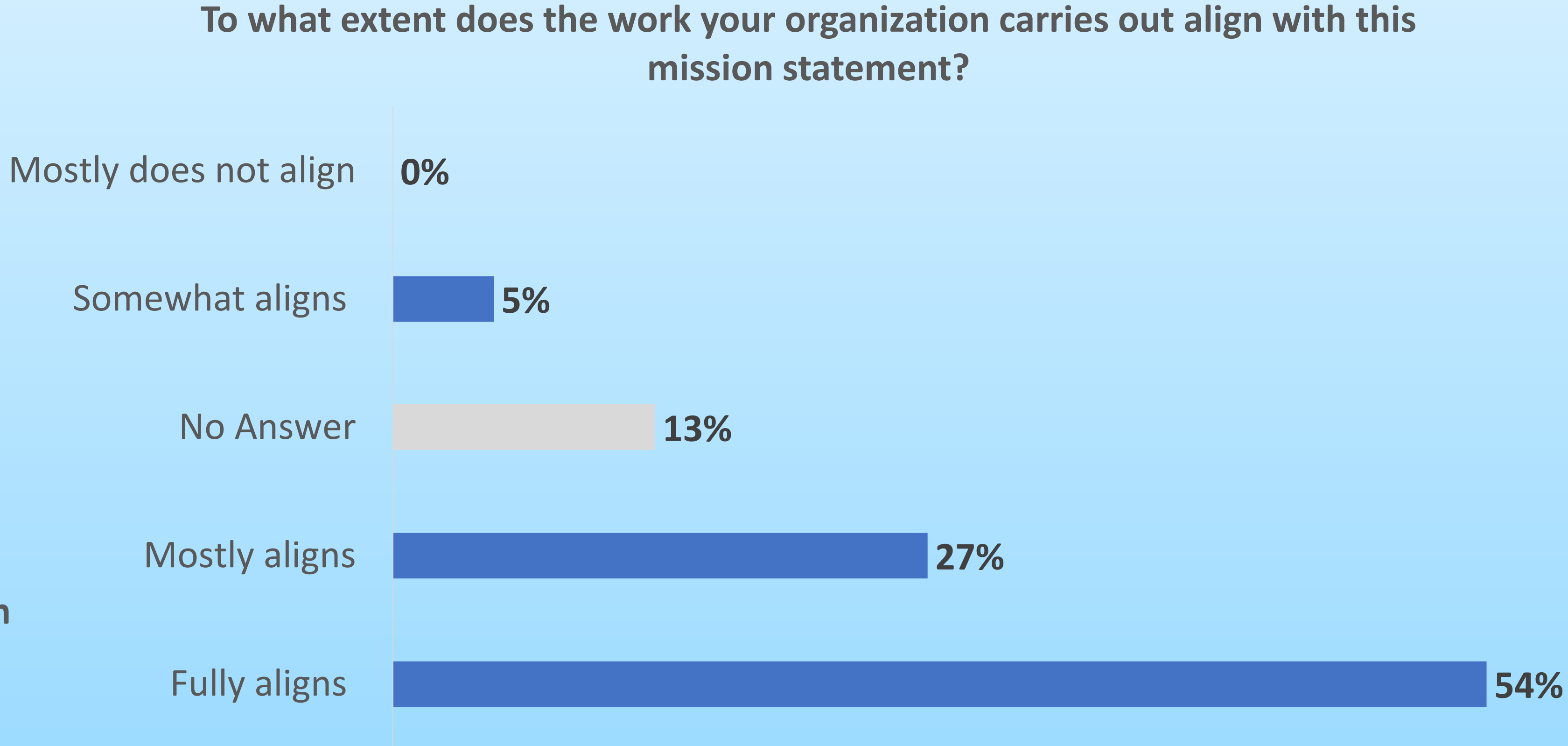
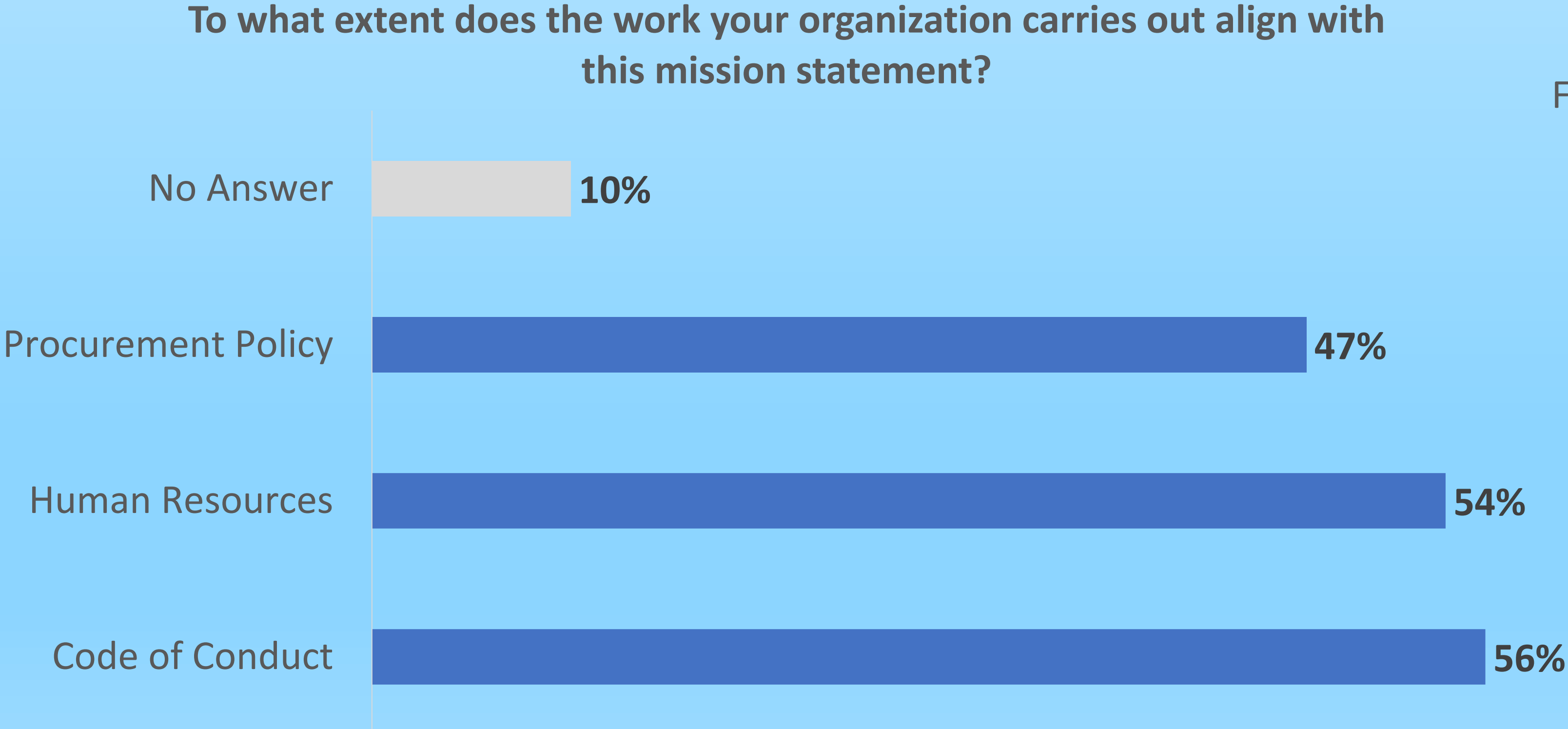


- At the same time, more technical areas such as security, WASH, technology and agriculture gather less interest for survey respondents.
- Looking at beneficiaries, CSOs respondents carry activities and projects mainly targeting Women (80%) and Youth (72%), with a sizable focus on poor and vulnerable communities (62%). Only 27% target small businesses, while 40% engage with rural communities.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Many respondents indicate implementing their activities aligned with a written long-term strategy, along with a clear mission statement, but within a margin of flexibility on the matter.

- **82%** of respondents enjoy a written long-term strategy and **87%** a clear mission statement for their overall action.
- Yet, only **54%** admitted that their work was “fully aligned” with their mission statement while **32%** indicate that it would “mostly” or “somewhat” align.



- **73%** of respondents indicate having clear and published internal policies, showing high professionalized structure of the sample who filled the survey. As such, **56%** of respondents have a board of directors at the base of their governance system, with only **16%** relying on their General Assembly.
- A majority of CSOs implement a form of code of conduct internally (**56%**), along with written policies related to human resources (**54%**). Yet, their scope remain limited, as CSOs struggle with enforcing national Labor Law regulations.

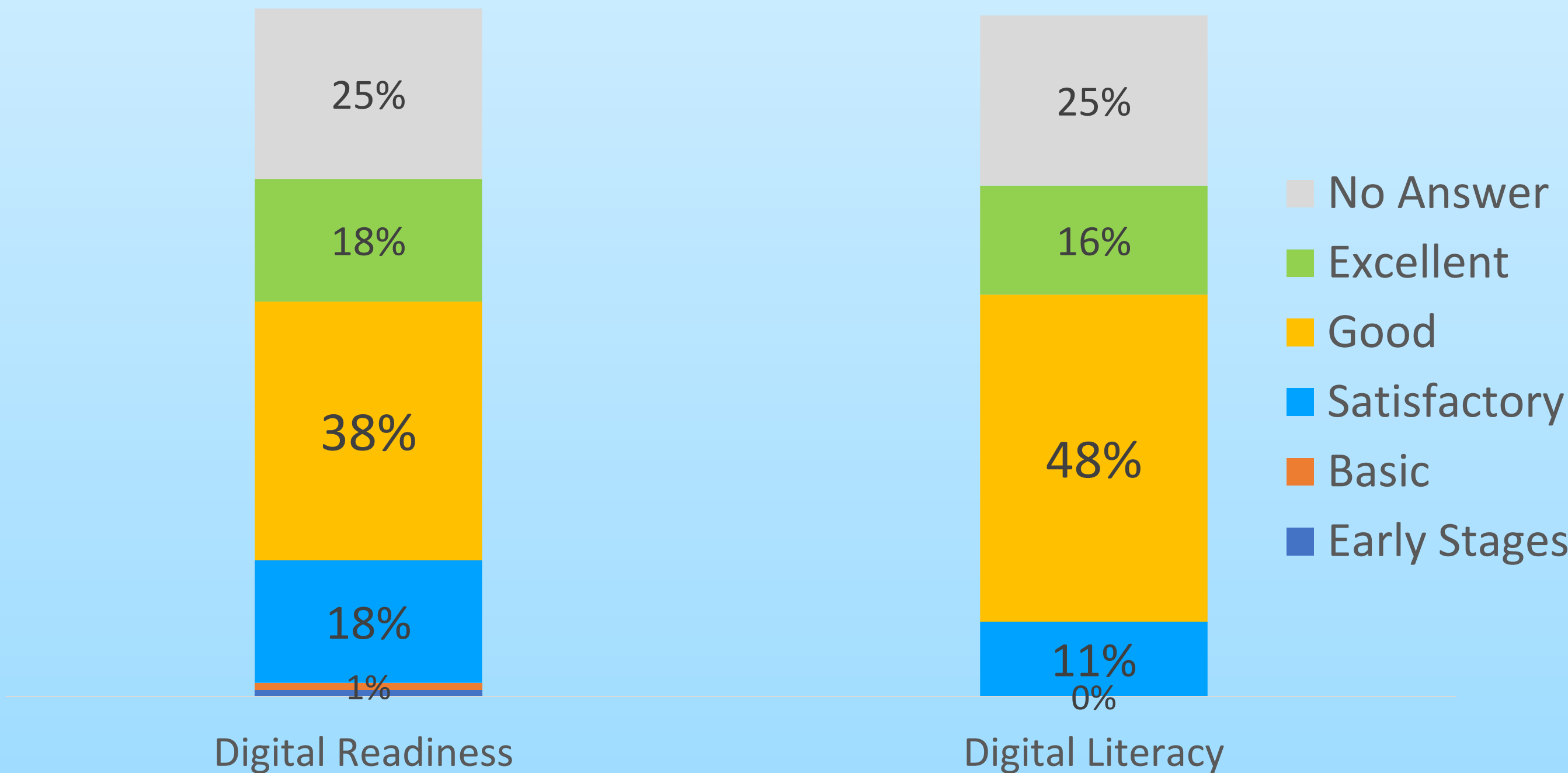


# DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGICAL READINESS

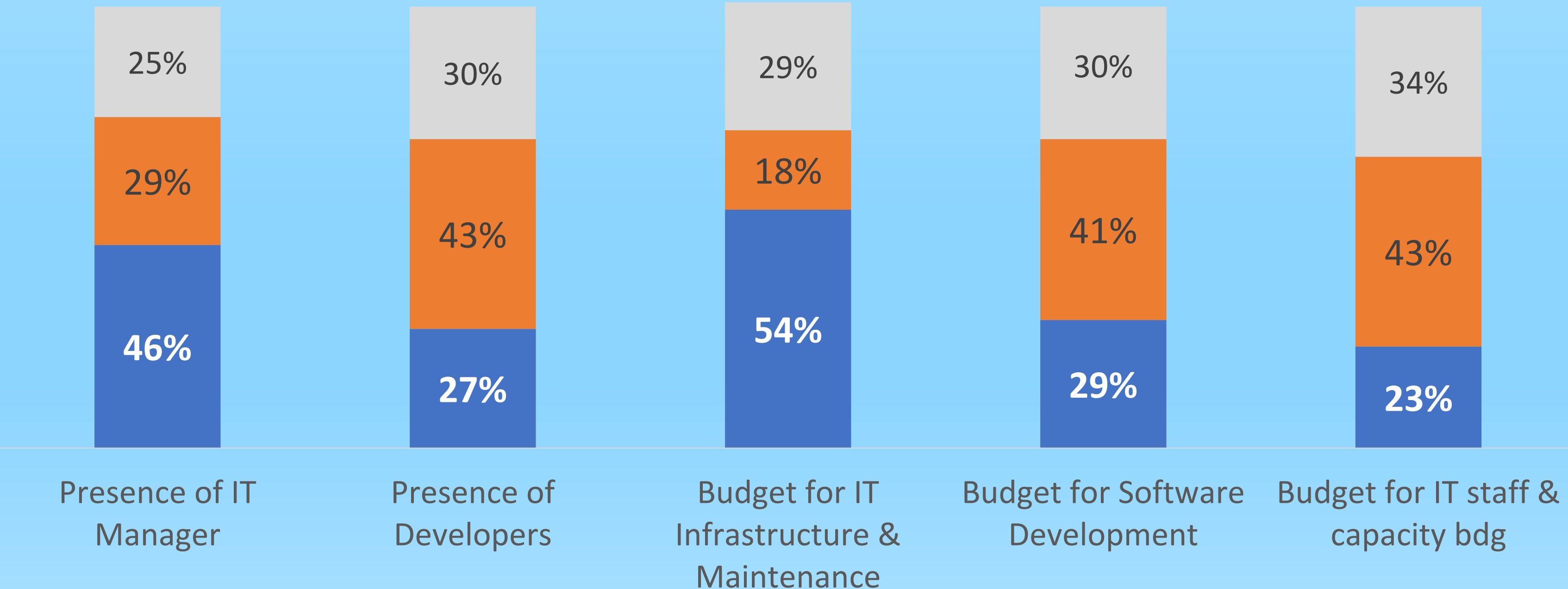
*A sizable group of respondents admit their limitations and challenges when it comes to digital literacy and readiness, namely in terms of technological investment, human resources and equipment. Most of CSOs cannot afford proper IT and development staff.*

- **25%** of CSOs preferred to avoid the questions in connection to digital preparedness (chart on right side), showing limitation of a great deal of organizations on this front.
- Respondents highlighted in sizable proportions how “Good” their readiness (**38%**) and literacy (**48%**) are today, with only **18%** and **11%** respectively stating an “Excellent” level of preparedness.
- As such, limitations mainly show in terms of CSOs actual investments in technological resources and tools, as the proportion of CSOs who preferred to yet again elude these questions is much revealing of the gaps many groups face in this area..

How do you rate your organization’s staff capacity in terms of :



Digital Capacity of CSO Respondents



- As a result, data shows that **73%** of CSOs respondents lack the presence of developers, **54%** of IT Managers and a further **71%** cannot afford to budget IT staff or software development equipment.
- That said, **54%** of respondents enjoy an IT infrastructure and provides for its maintenance, while **46%** have hired an IT manager for their operations.



# DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGICAL READINESS

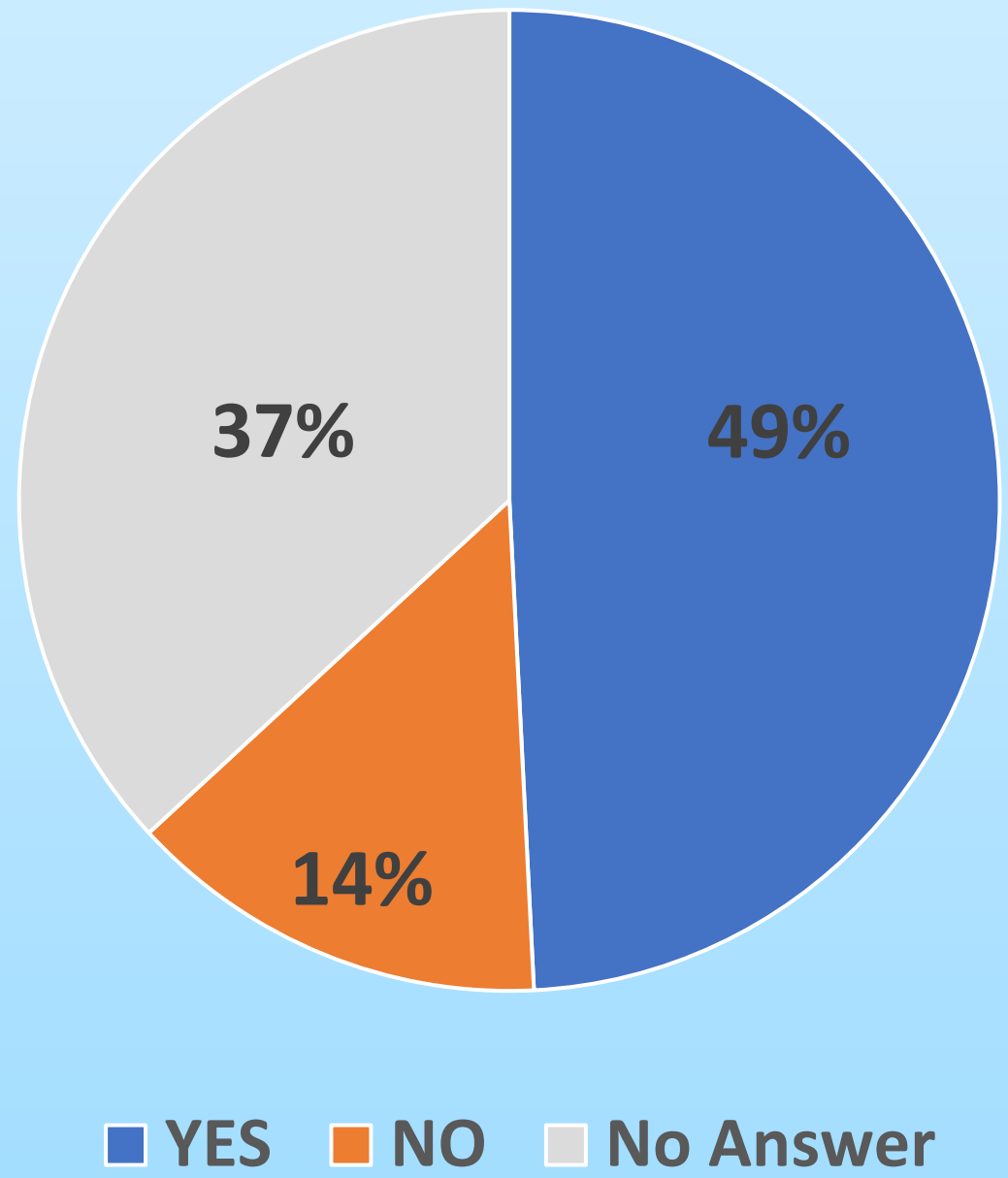
Looking at the usage of technological equipment and systems, a sizable ratio of respondents is up to speed with such dynamics, while others seem to struggle with integrating digital tools in their work flow. Investment in Social Media seems a step behind with an overreliance on Facebook.

- Only **49%** of respondents state to be enabled to work remotely, this in the middle of the pandemic which enforced mobility restrictions, sealing off offices and fieldwork for months. Most rely on laptops and internet, while a minority have invested in platforms such as Zoom or Teams.
- Moreover, only **39%** of respondents have a workflow system, while **36%** do not tackle the question. As a result, **61%** of CSOs have shown weakness in the use of technological systems.
- In terms of communication, the largest reliance falls on Facebook (**61%**), along with websites (**57%**). Instagram is also used while much less are present on Twitter (**40%**). **38%** preferred to ignore the question, and contrary to one might think, these are not the most ancient CSOS, as most of these respondents were established after 2005.

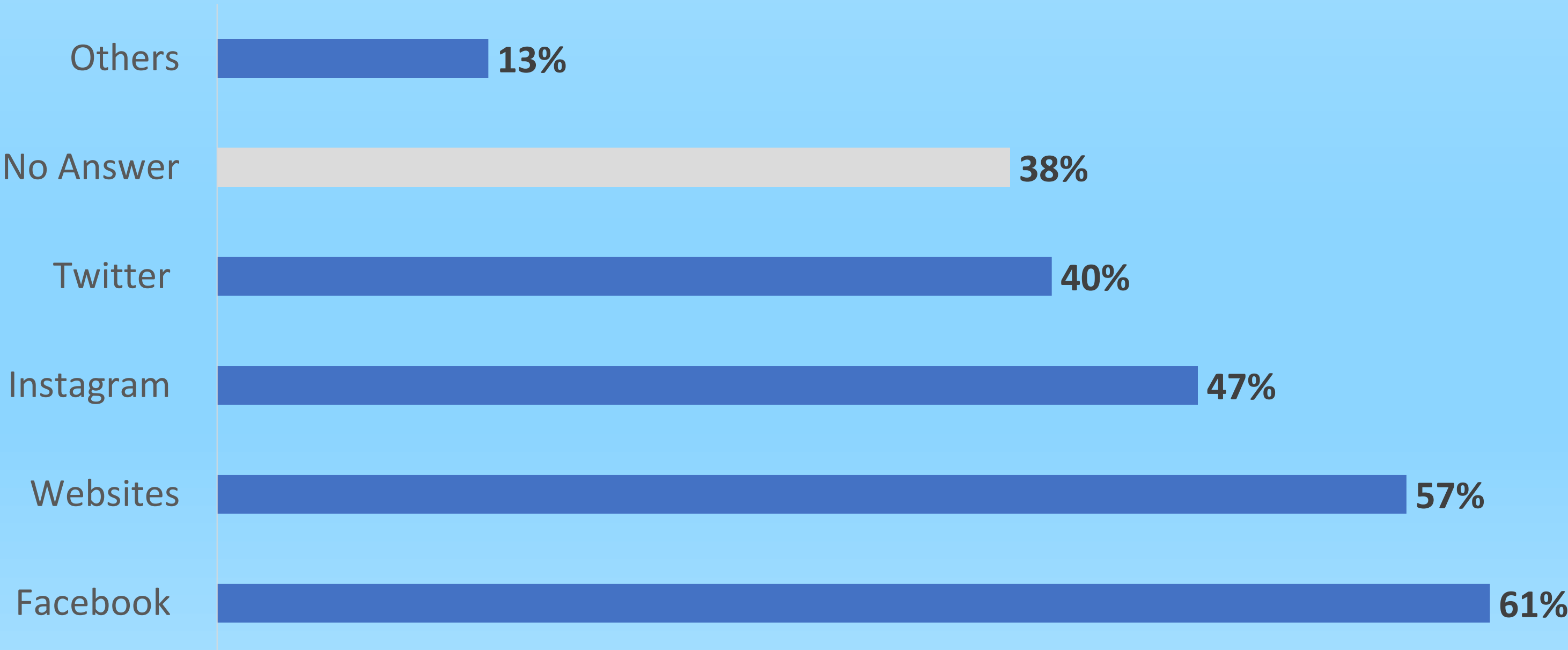
**29%**  
of CSOs only  
have written  
policies on data  
privacy & safety

**38%**  
Avoid the  
question over the  
use of  
communication  
tools

Is your organization enabled to work remotely?



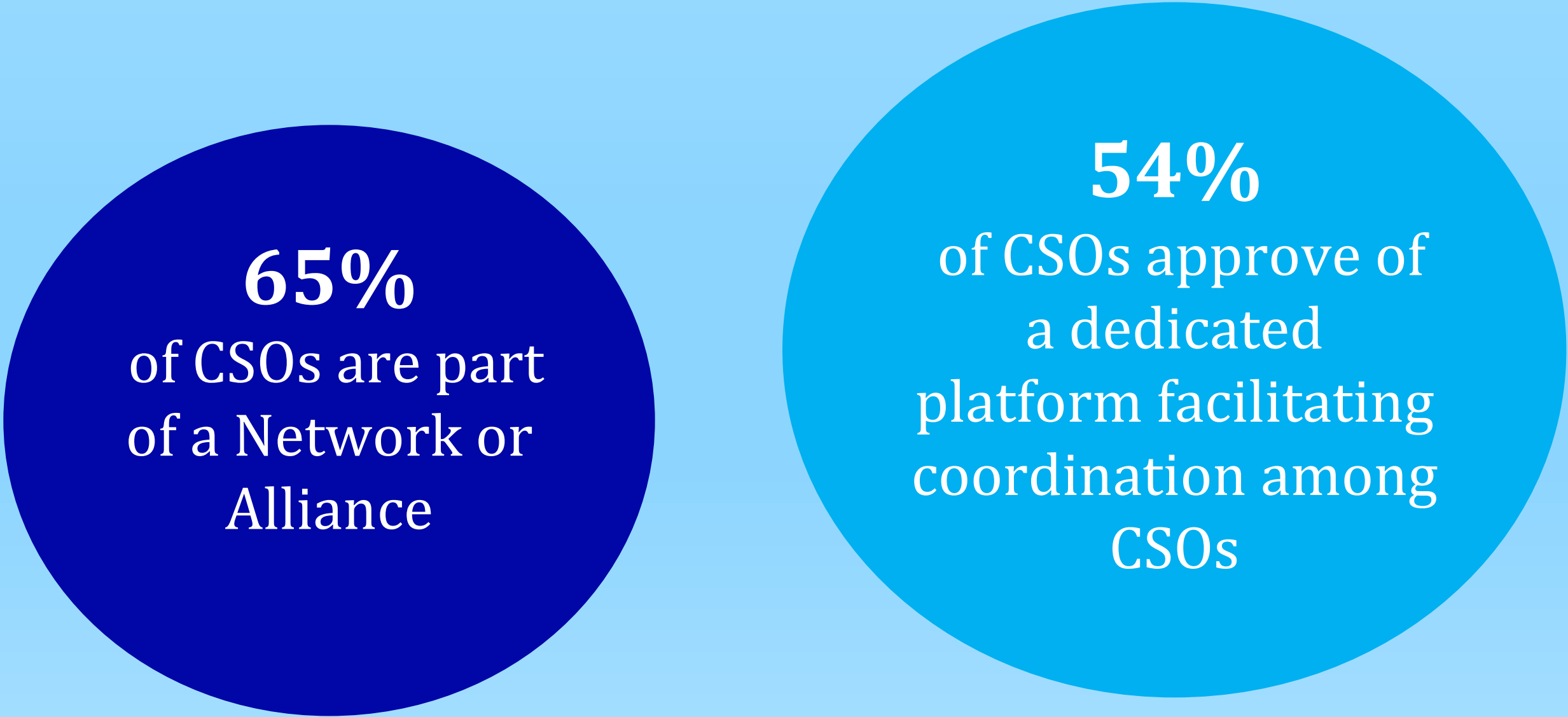
Which one of the following communication tools do you use?



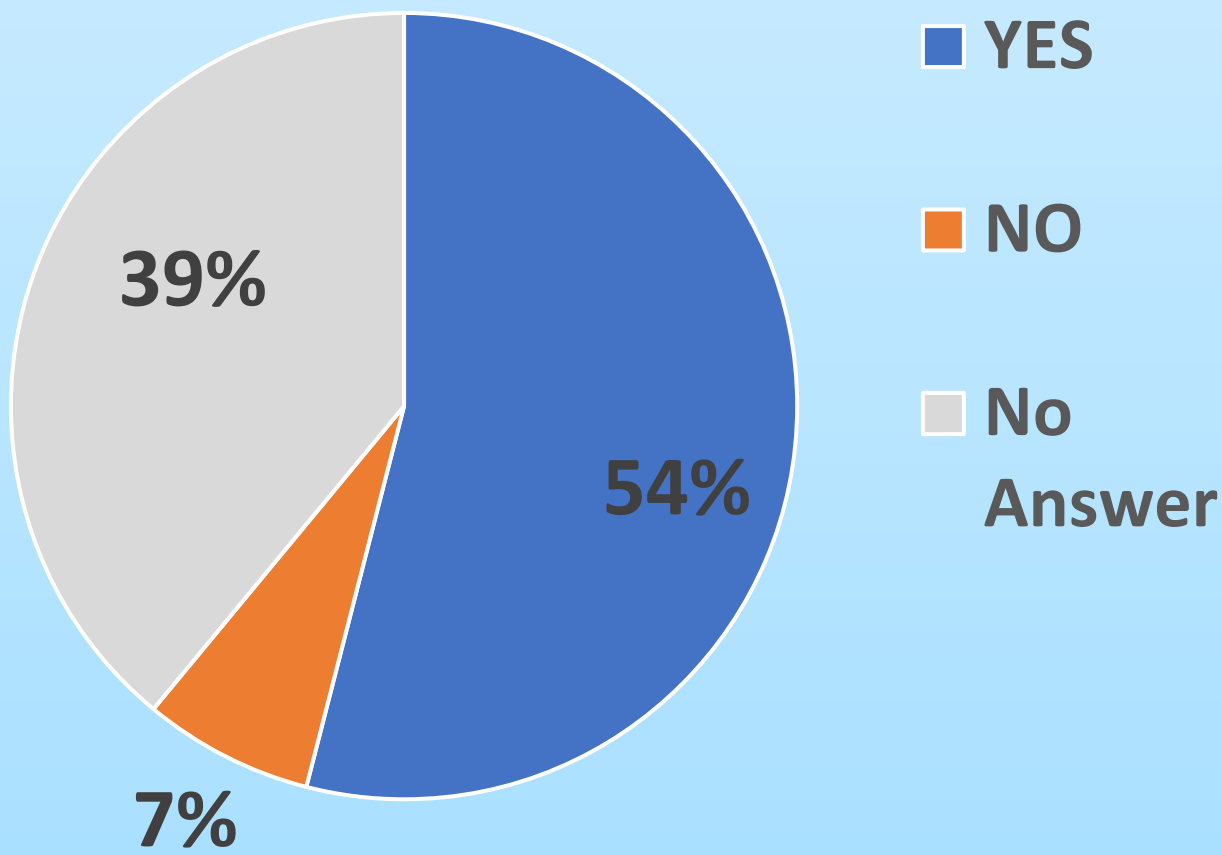
# NETWORKING, COORDINATION, ALLIANCES

Many CSOs are connected to national, regional or international networks in order to boost their outreach and access additional resources. Yet, interest in a dedicated platform to increase coordination does not spark a wide consensus.

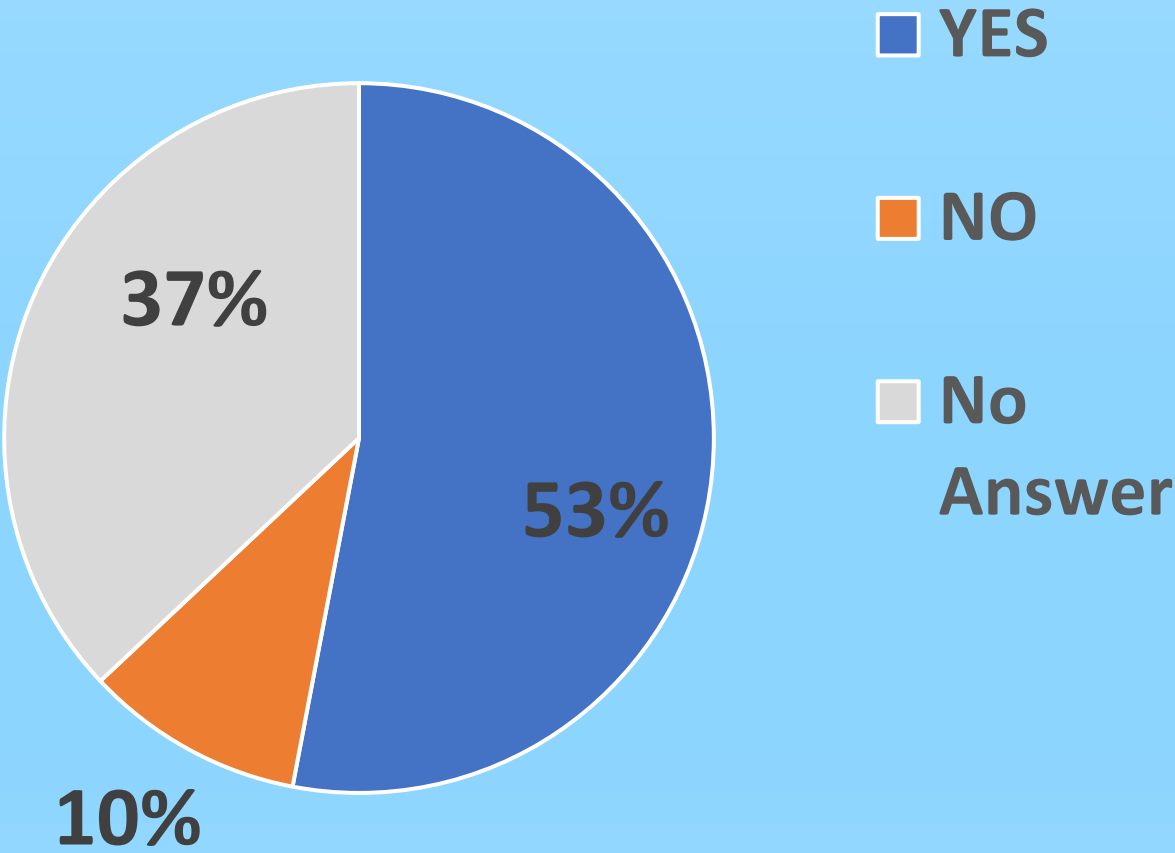
- A very large group of CSOs are part of a Network or Alliance (65%) to sustain their outreach and influence, whether national (such as task forces), regional (such as ANND) or international (such as ECOSOC).
- However, support towards an integrated digital platform to increase coordination and impact of CSOs in Lebanon only gather 54% of respondents with 39% abstaining from giving an opinion on the matter. Similar ratios were observed on the idea of having an online complaint mechanism system.
- Many pointed to the prior existence of such platforms (like Daleel Madani for instance) and how more consultation should be made ahead. Such caution from CSOs representatives is not surprising given how short lived many joint projects turn out to be due to the end of funding cycles or the shift in the donors' priorities. This was made clear during the FGD on July 13<sup>th</sup> as many discussants warned from this type of platform of being "just another project", instead of developing a much longer term objectives.



Do you feel there is a need for a specific CSO platform facilitating coordination among CSOs in Lebanon?



Would an online complaint mechanism to report corruption, mismanagement of funds, faulty delivery/execution of works be useful?



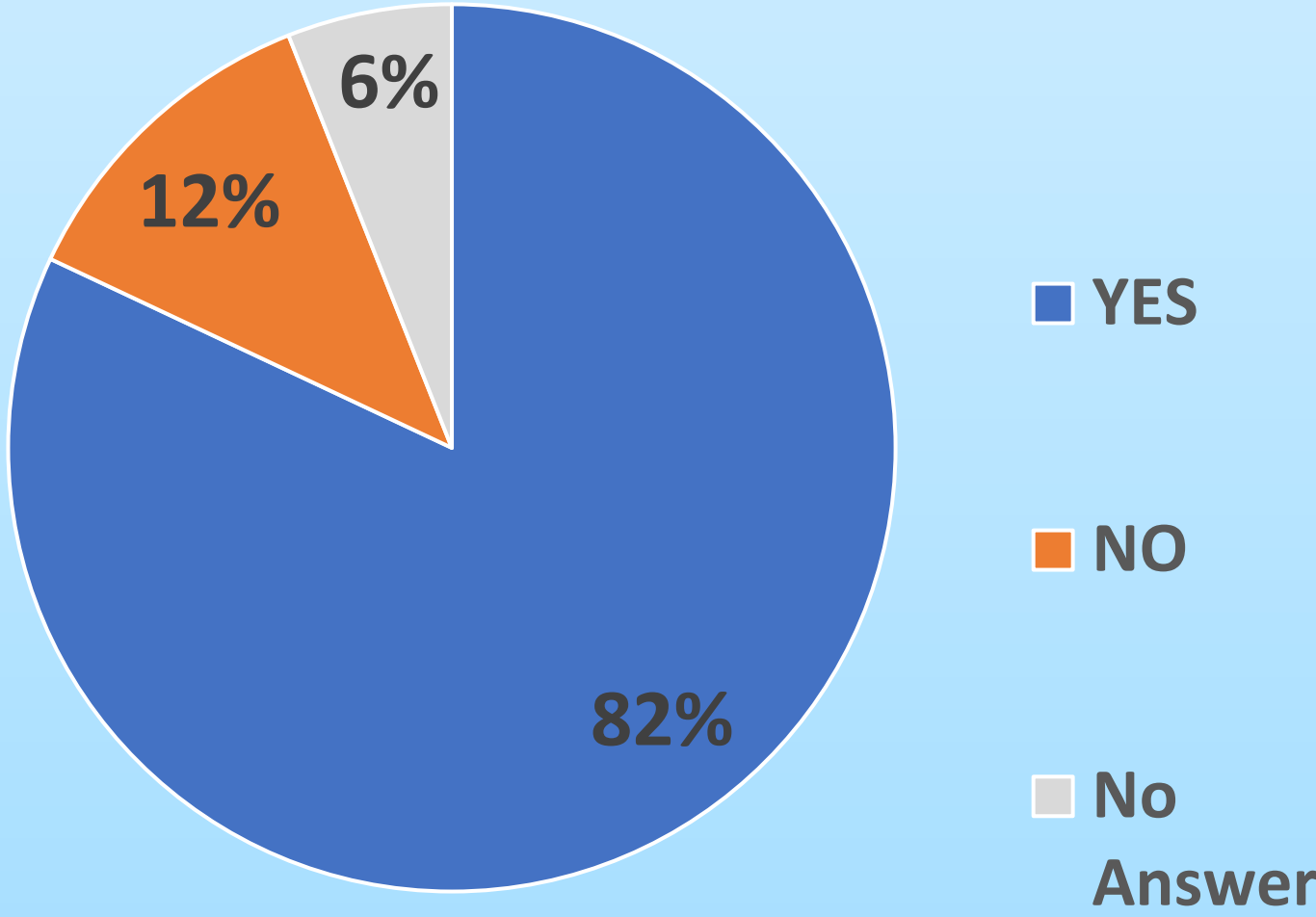


# ADVOCACY CAPABILITIES

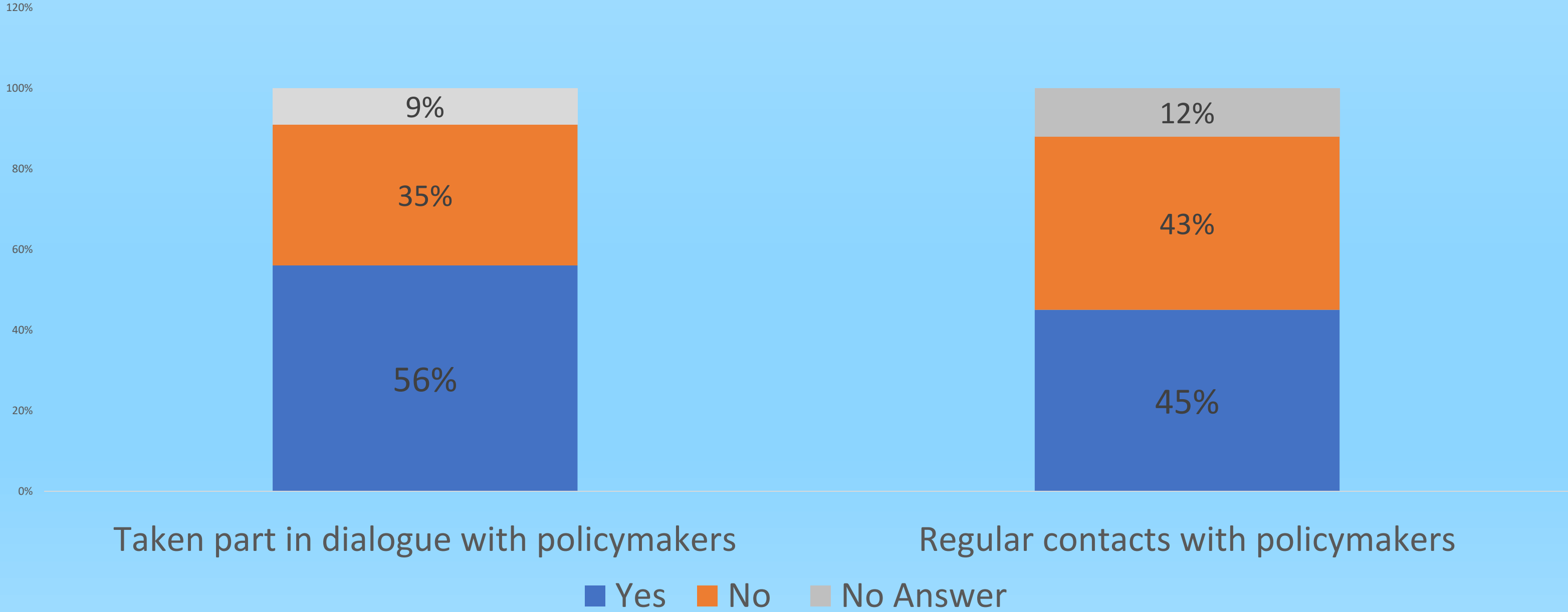
*Most CSOs are in the business of advocacy and contribute in campaigns in favor of awareness and reform. Yet, respondents of this survey seem to be less connected with policymakers in such efforts.*

- **82%** of CSOs respondents have direct interest in advocacy efforts, while **54%** of respondents have actually contributed to a campaign to lobby for policy or legislation reform versus **39%** who haven't. Among those who have, **91%** state their campaign was successful as they managed to push the borders on their advocacy issue.
- Moreover, a sizable proportion of CSOs (**56%**) have already taken part in a policy dialogue with policymakers, while **45%** work on maintaining regular contacts with relevant authorities for the purpose of lobbying. Among these, respondents mentioned MPs, political parties in power and various authorities depending on the relevant issue being lobbied for. Furthermore, **74%** among CSOs engaging in such policy dialogues had an optimistic view over these, highlighting their fruitfulness even in the absence of concrete implementation of the required reforms.

Is your organization interested in engaging in advocacy efforts?



Outreach with Policymakers

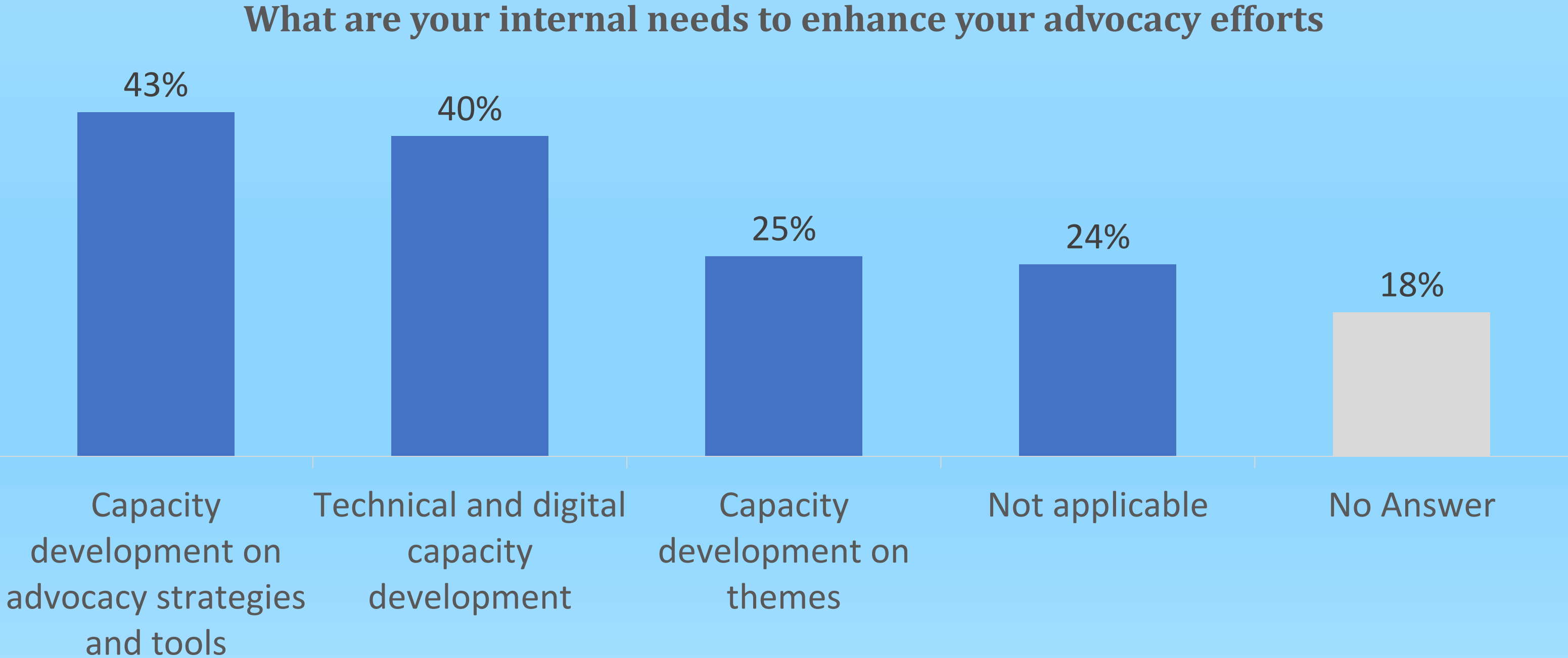
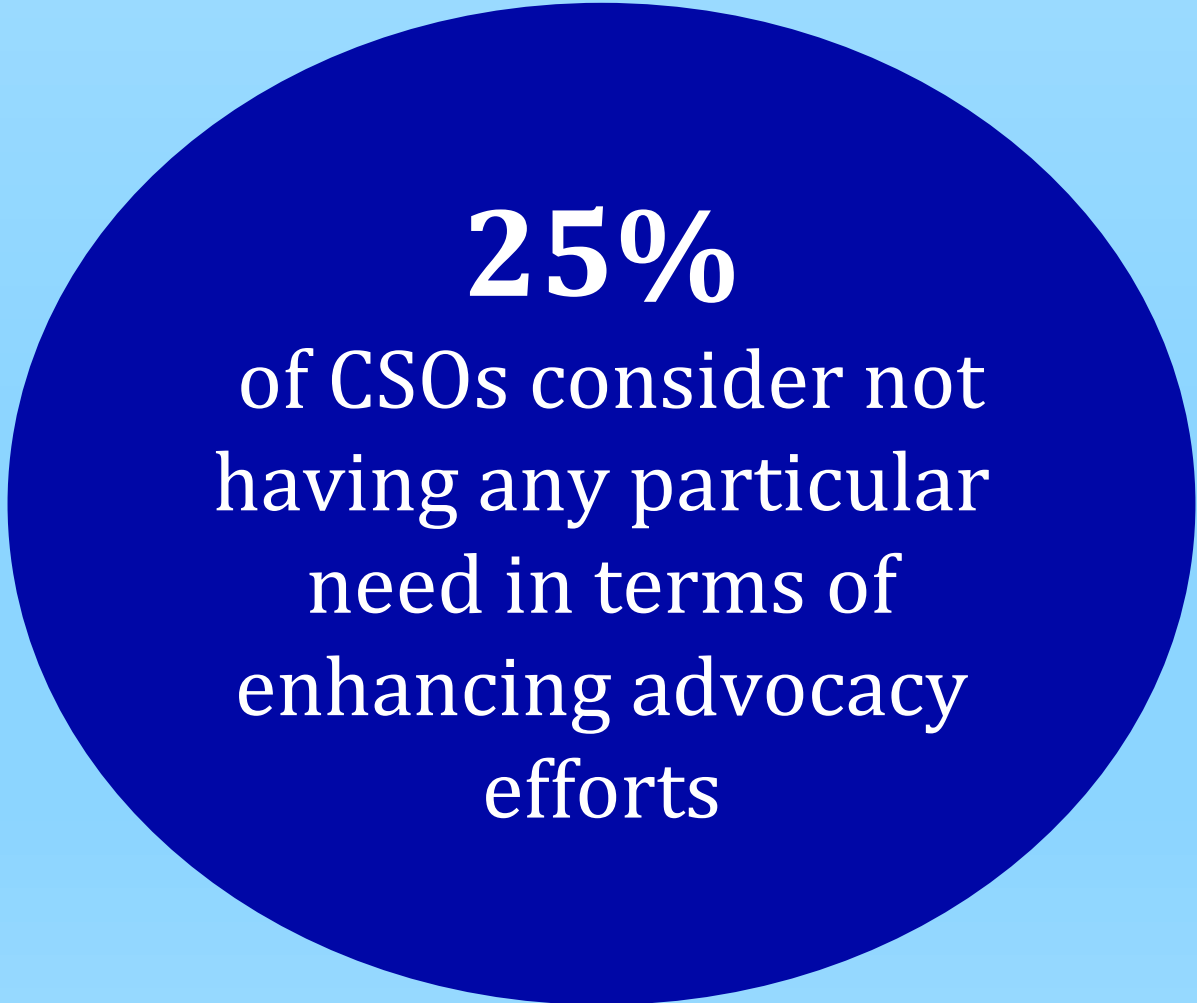
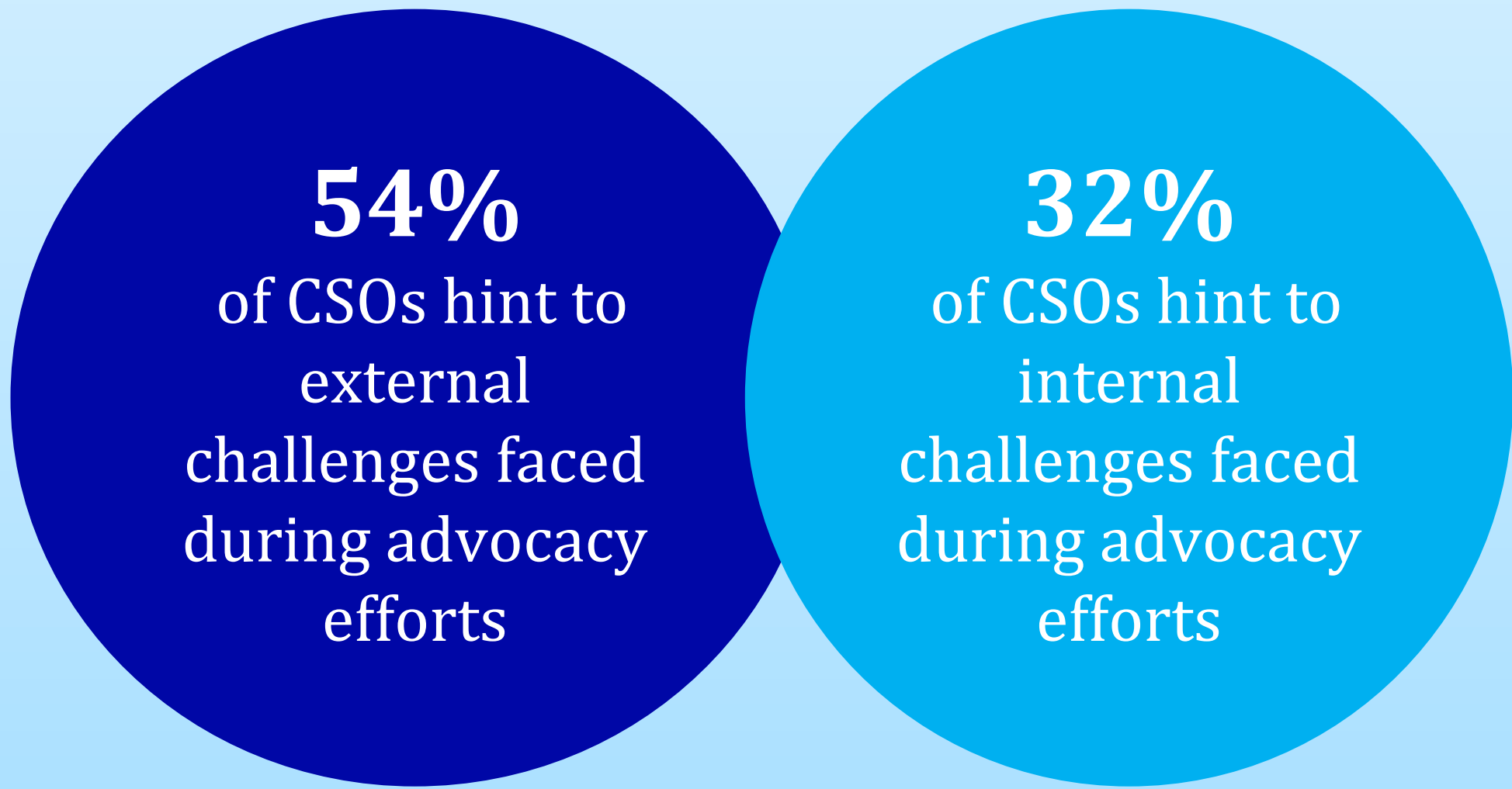


**74%** of CSOs engaged in policy dialogues consider them having bared fruitful outcomes

# ADVOCACY CAPABILITIES

Many CSOs face challenges in their advocacy efforts, but prefer to point to external factors rather than internal considerations.

- In terms of challenges, **54%** of respondents point to the political context as external factors particularly hindering their advocacy efforts, which explains the limited interaction between these respondents and the public authorities. On the other hand, those who do engage with policymakers seem to reach their targets and feel confident about their impact in favor of their respective issues. **14%** of CSOs even consider facing no challenge whatsoever on this front.
- On the other hand only **32%** of CSOs consider internal factors (as in lack of capacities and resources) as among the challenges on this level.
- When asked about the internal needs to enhance advocacy capabilities, CSOs respondents indicate the need to be further empowered in terms of strategies and tools (**43%**) along with technical and digital development (**40%**). 25% among respondents feel such needs do not apply to them, while **18%** preferred not to answer.

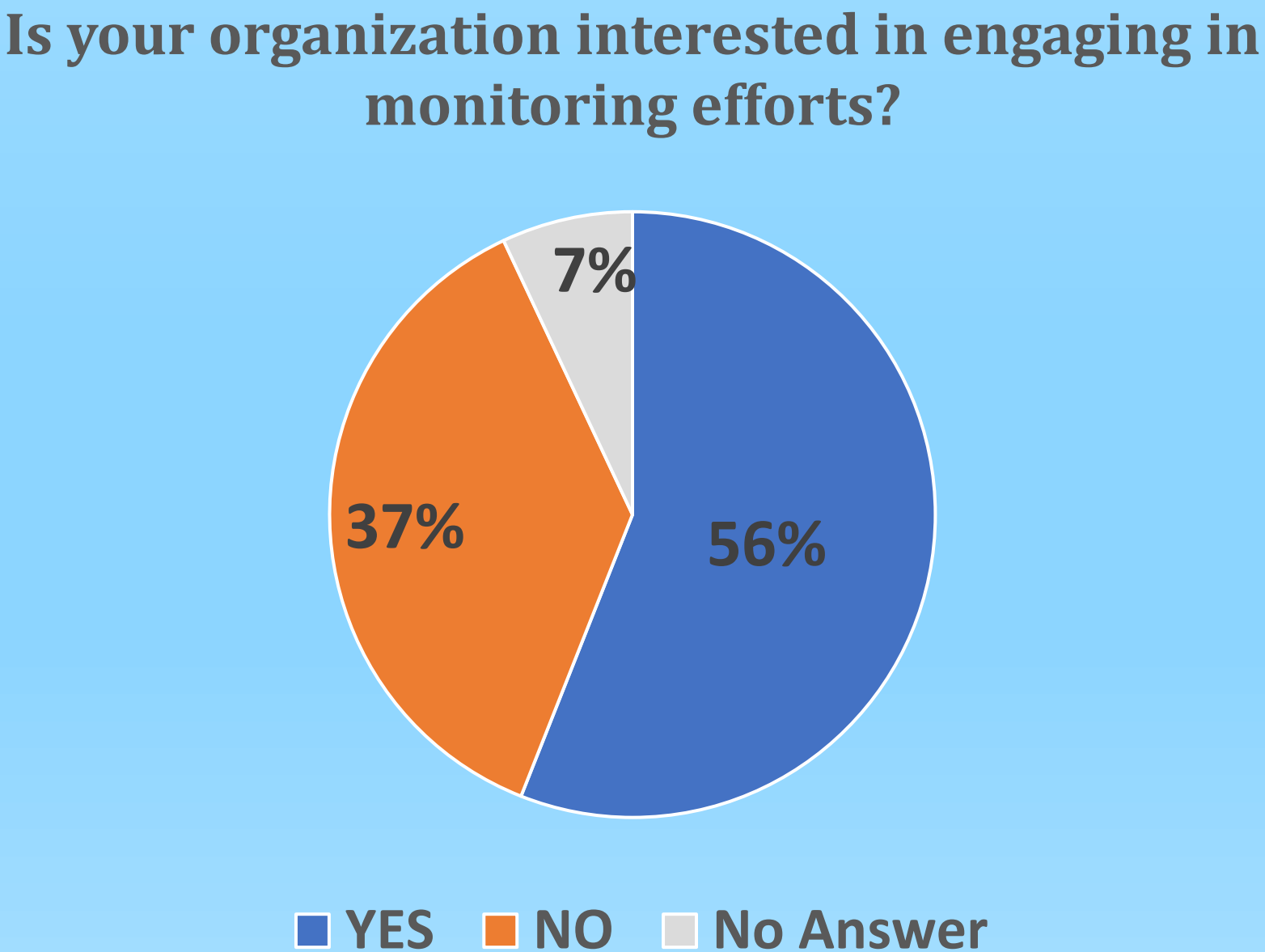
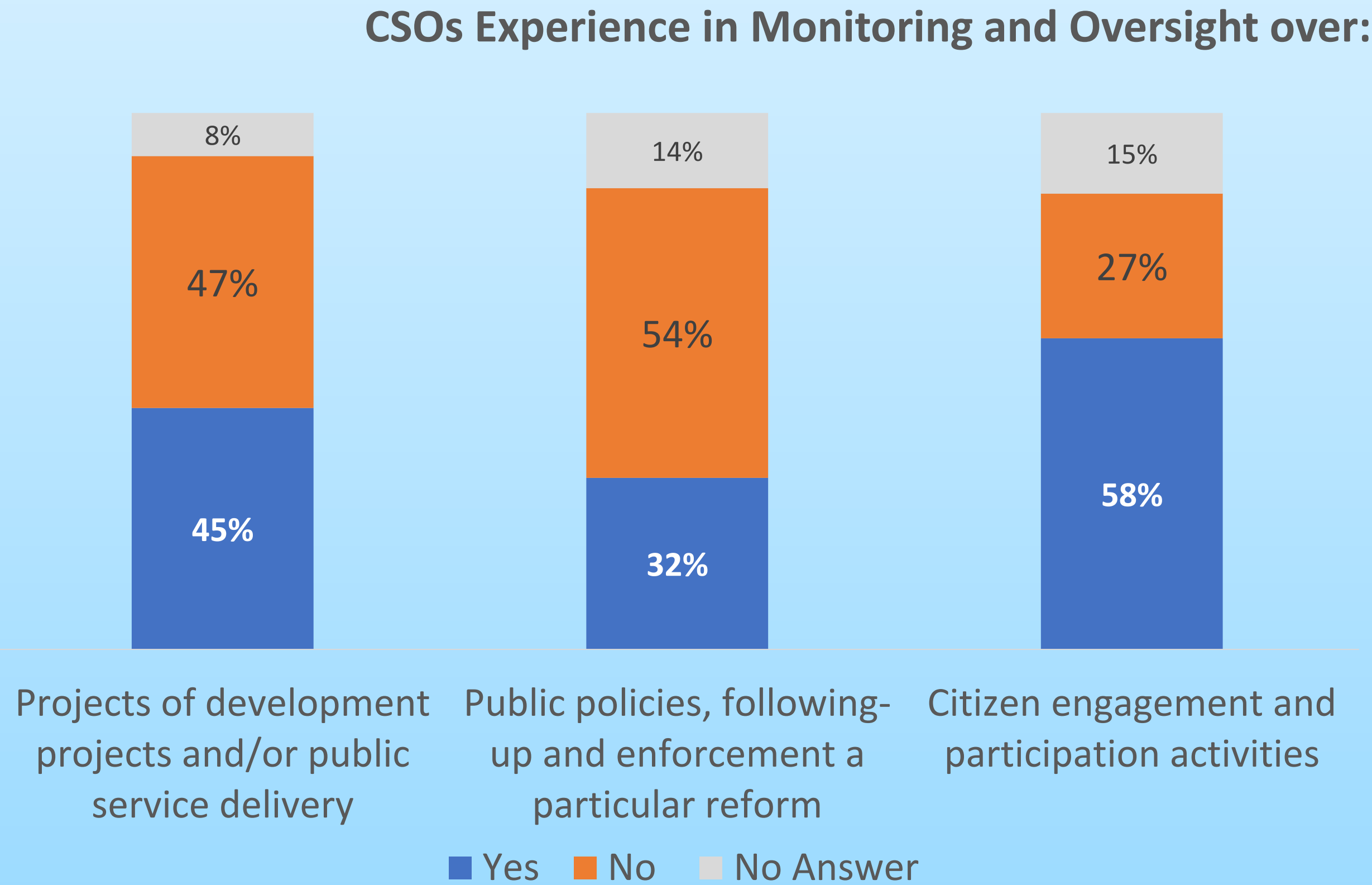
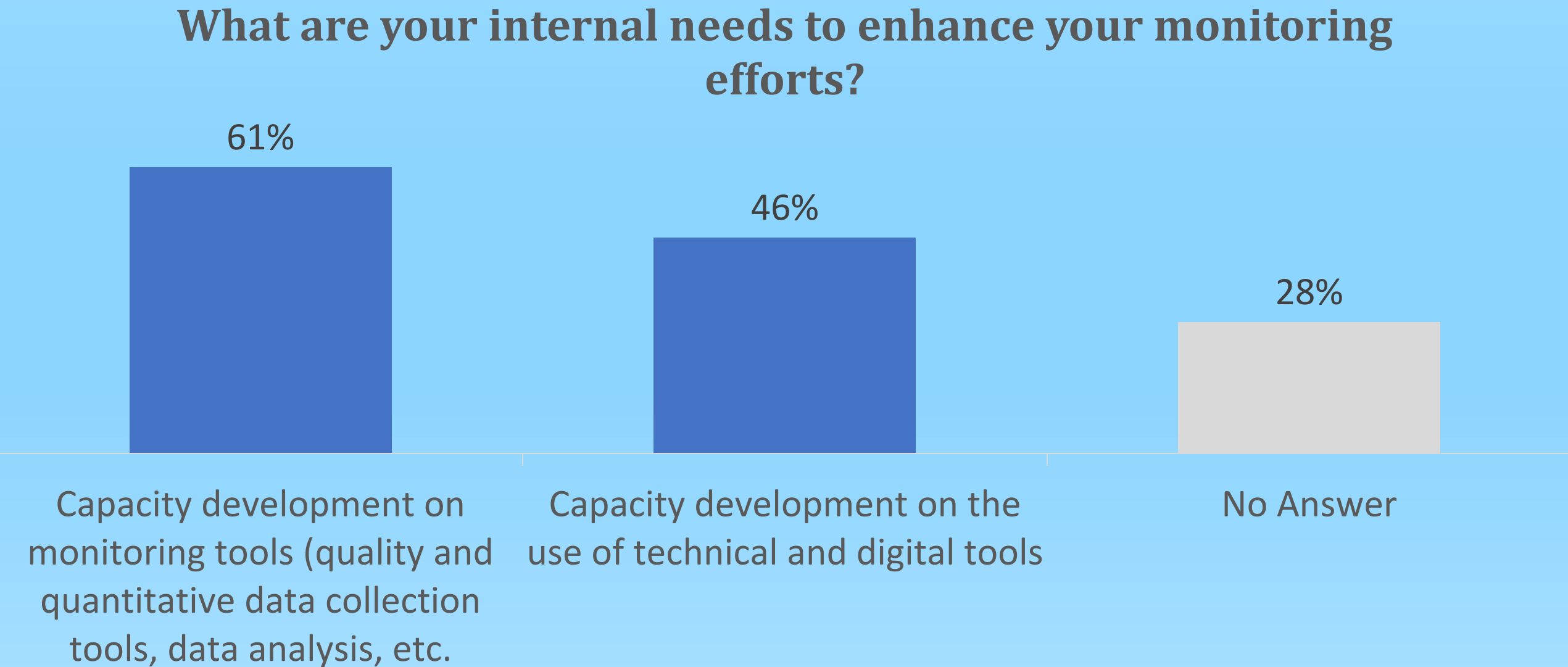




# MONITORING CAPABILITIES

*Respondent CSOs are less involved in Monitoring and oversight than the traditional Advocacy action, with significantly less experience in this field, as they fail to pin any concrete challenge on the matter.*

- **56%** of CSOs are interested in monitoring activities and efforts, as opposed to **82%** in the area of advocacy. Monitoring Human Rights and Environmental violations appear among the main activities highlighted by respondents, in addition to a handful of CSOs having dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation programs.
- As such, CSOs show much less experience in this area, with only **32%** having worked on following up on public policies reforms, while a majority have engaged in monitoring of citizen participation activities (**58%**).
- Moreover, **40%** of respondents ignore the question over the challenges faced in this field, while a handful of challenges were pinned by a few respondents, such as the lack of access to information, transparency and funding, in addition to difficulty of finding trained digital experts.
- In terms of needs, they appear much greater than for the advocacy field with **61%** open to capacity development on monitoring tools pertaining to data collection techniques. Furthermore, **46%** favor support on capacity development on use of digital technology.





## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- With a sample of **114** respondents out of more than 450 contacted CSOs, this survey managed to capture how much there is **room for improvement to enhance the digital capacity** of the organizations dedicated to the preservation of public interest and the protection of citizens and residents' rights in Lebanon.
- **The sample appeared balanced showing an interesting diversity in terms of size, age and activity fields**, even if many areas remain underrepresented such as Akkar, Baalbak-Hermel and Nabatieh. Almost half (**46%**) of the respondent CSOs were created between 2011 and 2020, showing the vivacity and energy of the Lebanese civil society. The period being concomitant with the massive influx of Syrian refugees, this context represented an important investment of many NGOs in the field, with **62%** of respondents addressing the needs of “poor and vulnerable communities”. Moreover, Women and Youth appear at the core of the concerns of the respondent CSOs, as **gender equality and socioeconomic impoverishment remain very high on the country's national policy agenda**.
- As such, education, social protection and economic livelihood come as the top three intervention areas by respondent CSOs, with less concentration in more technical fields such as agriculture, small enterprises or sanitation.
- The strong engagement of CSOs in their respective fields stems from a **well-established expertise, as advocacy and lobbying activities benefit from strong institutional apparatus**, despite the shortage in employed human resources and the over-reliance of CSOs in volunteers (respectively **48%** and **51%** work with less than 10 full time employees and 10 part-time employees); almost **10%** have no employees whatsoever. With **54%** of the surveyed CSOs having already engaged in an advocacy campaign (with an incredibly high rate of success of **91%**), the same proportion nevertheless points to external (political) factors to explain the slow path towards reforms in their respective priorities, with little readiness to look at internal and self shortcomings.
- On the other hand, **Monitoring and oversight activities pertaining to public policies and public services are much less developed in the Lebanese civil society context**. Despite **56%** among respondent CSOs showing interest in this scope of work, the size of the expertise is less prominent in the survey results, with **54%** having never monitored the enforcement of a particular reform and **47%** a public delivery service. Instead, CSOs prefer to monitor citizens' engagement in policy issues (**58%**), which comes as a core element in the process of building a public opinion in support of their respective causes.



## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

- The digital capacity of CSOs depends on their size and resources **in a sector which is traditionally dominated by business firms and governments**. In Lebanon, despite the vibrant civil society, the **survey showed how lack of funding and capacity-building have restricted CSOs' digital readiness and literacy**. High irresponsiveness levels to this section of the questionnaire uncovered uneasiness with the topic, as the **survey also revealed a reductive conception of CSOs over what digital preparedness really means**. As such, when **75%** of CSOs express general satisfaction towards their own digital environment, they nevertheless **admit the shortage of means and investment** when pointing to the absence of specific digital assets. This is particularly telling in the case of developers, software development or digital training programs, which appear underdeveloped in the context of the respondent CSOs. Still, **54%** among these do hold an IT infrastructure with maintenance arrangements, in addition to **46%** of CSOs having IT managers.
- Furthermore, CSOs have expressed their limitations in their ability of working remotely (only **49%**) and diversifying their communication tools that appear too overwhelmingly dependent to social media (and Facebook in particular). Moreover, only **29%** of respondent CSOs have written policies on digital privacy and safety.

\*

- As the overall situation in Lebanon continues to deteriorate, civil society will continue to be under greater strain and pressure to provide for a population which struggles with surviving the ordeal which daily life has become. The Covid-19 pandemic and the successive lock downs have disrupted the work and activities of CSOs, as many were not equipped to run through such mobility restrictions, adding to the importance of investing in digital preparedness, which lies at the core of the Digital PACT supported by this policy brief.
- As the needs and challenges increase, the **interest for resorting to digital and technological tools for mapping, assessing, monitoring and advocating is paramount**. In a recent study on digital preparedness in times of Covid-19, the Intelligence Unit of The Economist has named this crucial leap forward the “**Transformative Imperative**”, arguing the “critical role of technology in helping businesses, citizens and societies adapt” to Covid-19 pandemic(\*).
- However, **CSOs have yet to warm to the idea of integrating digital tools to enhance better coordination and achievement of their policy goals**. Whether in the survey or the FGD, many warned of the risk of duplication of such platforms, in addition to fearing the lack of sustainability, missing the connection with citizens or losing channels with policymakers, which are not familiar with such modern technology.

(\*) Source The Economist Intelligence Unit. The Transformative Imperative, Digital drivers in the covid-19 pandemic, Microsoft, May 2021, available at [Transformation Imperative | Microsoft & The Economist Group](#)



# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering these findings, and for the purpose of supporting digital enhancement of Lebanese civil society, the present policy brief offers the following recommendations:

## To Lebanese Authorities

- Preserve Lebanon from any durable Internet black-out due to the deterioration of public finances and prevent the deterioration of national telecoms infrastructure;
- Facilitate the import of technological material and equipment to ensure access to modern digital tools for the Lebanese society;
- Engage and Invest in digital government platforms such as IMPACT in order to make public information available (and hence implement all aspects of Access to Information legislation), enhance coordination among different public entities, digitalize administrative procedures, coordinate reform and action with CSOs and relevant stakeholders;
- Engage with digital CSOs platforms to increase dialogue coordination and co-operation efforts with CSOs and secure necessary support for public administrations to launch and implement long awaited reforms in pursuit of serving public interest.

## To CSOs:

- Place digital modernization at the heart of their mission statement;
- Empower staff and volunteers through training on digital tools and resources;
- Invest in data security and arrange for the preservation of data privacy of staff, volunteers and beneficiaries;
- Resort to digital tools for fundraising purposes and set a dedicated proportion of annual budget in IT capacities and digital modernization;
- Secure and develop partnerships with digital and technology agencies in support of mutual benefits, in the form of **Digital Civil Society Labs**, which would support civil society to thrive in the digital age;
- Engage in a joint digital platform of CSOs that would allow easier access to information, facilitate advocacy efforts, identify and reach target groups, develop monitoring and oversight activities, increase nationwide and international visibility and bridge the gap between State and citizens by empowering the latter to voice their concerns and priorities towards national and local authorities.