



# Disinformation and Civil Society Mapping Slovakia

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## 1. Basic information and indexes

- Population (World Bank estimate): 5,449,270
- Official languages: Slovak, minorities use their respective languages in official communication
- Religion (The 2021 population and housing census): Roman Catholic - 55.76% of the population, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (5.27%), the Greek Catholic Church (4%), no religious belief (23.79%)
- Internet access (Eurostat): 4.94 million (90.65%)
- Mobile phone (smartphone) users (Statista): 3.45 million (63.36%)
- Active social media users (Statista): 4.05 million (74.4%)
- [Freedom House \(Nations in Transit 2022\)](#): 71/100
- [Freedom House \(Freedom in the World\)](#): 90/100
- Press Freedom Index ([Reporters Without Borders](#)): 78.37
- Corruption Index 2021 ([Transparency Int.](#)): 53/100
- [Amnesty International](#):
- [Media Sustainability Index \(2021\)](#): Slovakia not covered
- [Civicus](#): 77/100
- [Chatham House](#): no specific data
- [OECD Multi-dimensional country reviews: \(Slovakia not covered\)](#)

Slovakia has been independent since 1993, as a result of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. This makes the country fairly young, shaped and influenced by years under the influence of the Soviet Union, making it essentially a post-communist state and transitioning to a liberal democracy that is part of the European Union as well as NATO. With **population of 5,449,270** Slovakia is quite small with 53.19% living in urban areas and 46.81% in rural areas, and only two cities with a population over 100 000 (the capital city, Bratislava, with approximately 421 000 inhabitants, and Košice with 238 000). The **official language is Slovak**, with 81.77% of the population using it as their mother language. However, a special law makes it possible for national minorities to use their native tongue in official communication. The other most used language is Hungarian, with 8.48% of people considering it their native, making the Hungarian minority the largest in Slovakia. When it comes to the **religious beliefs** of Slovak people - the Roman Catholic Church represents 55.76% of the population, followed by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (5.27%), and the Greek Catholic Church (4%). People who declare as atheist/without religion represent 23.79% of the population.<sup>1</sup> The level of **internet access** was 90.65% in December 2022, according to Eurostat.<sup>2</sup> However, **smartphones** are used by only around 63.36% of the population.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, **social media users** represent 74.4% of the population, or 4.06 million people, out of whom 79.33% use Facebook, which is the most popular social media site in Slovakia, followed by Instagram (7.21%), Pinterest (6.75%), Twitter (2.96%), YouTube (2.08%), and Reddit (0.66%).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> THE 2021 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS. *Population – Basic results*.

<sup>2</sup> EUROSTAT. *Households – level of internet access*.

<sup>3</sup> STATISTA. *Forecast of smartphone user numbers in Slovakia from 2015 to 2022*.

<sup>4</sup> STATCOUNTER. *Social Media Stats Slovakia (Slovak Republic, December 2022)*.

When it comes to indexes, according to Freedom House, the **Freedom in the World index** for Slovakia represents a score of 90/100, with civil liberties obtaining a score of 53/60 and political rights having a score of 37/40, thus marking Slovakia as a free country. Slovakia's parliamentary system has regular multiparty elections without violent transfers of power between rival parties and with civil liberties protected.<sup>5</sup> However, the **corruption rate** is quite high, scoring 53/100 points in **Corruption Perceptions Index**, ranking 49th out of 180 countries. In addition, according to the Global Corruption Barometer, 19% claim that corruption increased in the last year, while 11% of public service users paid bribes in the previous year. Moreover, discrimination against Roma people and increasing hostility towards migrants and refugees are challenges the country is facing. When it comes to **the Nations in Transit 2022 index**, Slovakia is considered to be a consolidated democracy with a score of 71/100 points, a democracy percentage of 70.83, and a democracy score of 5.25/7. There has been a decline especially in the democratic score from previous score of 5.32/7, also due to decline in rating of the Civil Society sector from 6.25 to 6.00 on account of the "demobilization of liberal civic actors and the growing prominence of violent illiberalism in the anti-vaccination movement." Another reason for the decline has been the decline in the corruption rate from 4.25 to 4.00, reflecting the disagreements within the institutions, and conflicts within the ruling coalition that limited the fight against corruption.<sup>6</sup> **The Press Freedom Index** ranks Slovakia 27th out of 180 countries, with a score of 78.37. After the murder of an investigative journalist in 2018, there has been an active effort to increase press freedom, but the progress is slow and journalists work in a hostile atmosphere, with the media also being vulnerable to interests outside of journalism.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to human rights, **Amnesty International** points to discrimination and hatred towards Roma people, gender-based violence with the still unratified Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women, efforts to limit access to sexual and reproductive rights, and hatred towards immigrants, especially immigrants and refugees with Arabic ethnicity.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Social and political landscape

World War II had a major influence on the social and political landscape of Slovakia. As a result of it, Czechoslovakia was renewed as a joint state of Czech and Slovaks in 1945 and entered the Cold War as one country, part of the Eastern Bloc and under the influence of the Soviet Union. This also meant that it became a totalitarian state with repressed or limited freedoms and restricted civil society. However, there was an attempt to change the totalitarian regime in 1968 with a brief liberalization period known as [the Prague Spring](#), which was foiled by the invasion of the Warsaw Treaty armies in August 1968 in response to the protests. This marked a period of normalization when politicians loyal to the Soviet Union seized the power, which in turn led to paralysis of the public space where politically oriented civic activities, that were not in line with the official ideology, disappeared. This doesn't mean that civil society did not exist. It took the form of secret gatherings, with people caught taking part in them, often ending up persecuted by State Security (StB, essentially a secret police) or ending up as political prisoners persecuted for their ideological stance or religion (which was essentially prohibited).

Another dramatic change came with [the Velvet Revolution in 1989](#), when massive protests were organized by the civil society. The Velvet Revolution led to the establishment of democracy in the

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<sup>5</sup> FREEDOM HOUSE. *Freedom in the world 2022, Slovakia*.

<sup>6</sup> FREEDOM HOUSE. *Nations in transit 2022, Slovakia*.

<sup>7</sup> REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS. *Slovakia*.

<sup>8</sup> AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. *Report 2021/2022, Slovakia*.

Slovak Republic, which became a newly enacted democratic country in 1993. Yet, the transformation period was marked with numerous challenges throughout the '90s. Firstly, many people applied for Czech visas, as the Czech Republic was seen as the stronger and more developed country out of the two, and that sentiment persists still today. Moreover, political tensions between neighboring countries that were suppressed during the Soviet period, reemerged, especially in connection to the large Hungarian minority living in the Slovak territory, which is still perceived rather negatively.

There were also numerous issues concerning human rights, specifically the treatment of minorities, most notably the Roma, which persists today. It was enhanced by populist nationalism supported by prime minister Vladimír Mečiar, which posed a threat of Slovakia going down an undemocratic path. However, by the end of the 1990s, as a result of public discontent and protests, Mečiar lost the elections. A new coalition with a new president turned Slovakia back to the side of liberal democracy, resulting in the country's entrance into the EU and NATO (2004).

Yet, Slovak Republic has been a liberal democracy for only two decades, which is not long time for an effective democracy to function and take root. Despite being labelled as a free liberal democracy, Slovakia could still be considered a country in transition with several challenges like high level of corruption, the inefficiency of institutions, concerns over treatment of minorities and refugees, and political instability, with part of the population with pro-Western stance and another part reminiscing about the Soviet era (also due to still present propaganda).<sup>9</sup>

Besides having a part of population that is inclined towards communism with a pro-Russian orientation and another part of the country that is pro-western and often more liberal, Slovakia is fairly conservative, with religion playing a key role in both politics and social life. By joining the EU in 2004, as well as Schengen in 2007, and the Eurozone in 2009, Slovakia became fully integrated into the European Union. The country has also been a member of NATO since 2004, and the official political direction has been considered as being the more pro-European and essentially more pro-liberal democracy pair out of the V4 countries.<sup>10</sup>

Slovakia's closest ally is the Czech Republic, both politically and culturally, obviously due to the fact of previously being one country and the dissolution and consequent separation being carried out rather peacefully.

## 2.1. Response to the war in Ukraine

Despite part of the population having strong pro-Russian sentiments, Slovakia became one of the major aid providers, supporters, and allies for Ukraine after the invasion in February of 2022. Starting with Slovak Republic being the first country to provide air defense (it supplied the S-300 air defense system,<sup>11</sup> eight self-propelled Zuzana 24 howitzers, armored personnel carriers BMP-1, helicopters Mi-17, also Mi-2, rockets, tanks, and other weapons).<sup>12</sup> There is currently (February 2023) a discussion going on about the possibility of donating twin-engine fighter aircraft MiG-29.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> BRITANNICA. *Slovakia*. & EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Slovakia, Overview, Political, social and economic background and trends*.

<sup>10</sup> POLITICO. *The not-so-fantastic 4: Central Europe's divided Visegrad alliance*.

<sup>11</sup> REUTERS. *Slovakia sends its air defence system to Ukraine*.

<sup>12</sup> REUTERS. *Slovakia give Mi helicopters, Grad rockets to Ukraine*.

<sup>13</sup> TA3. *S-300, húfnice, bévépéčka aj Božena. Akú vojenskú techniku Slovensku už dodalo Ukrajine?*

The country's President became also one of the advocates for the candidate status for Ukraine in the European Union.<sup>14</sup> Besides the defense aid, Slovak humanitarian aid efforts made the country one of the leaders in providing support (considering its size in relation to the country's GDP), ranking 4<sup>th</sup> among the nations providing help.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, civil society organizations and NGOs joined the call "Who will help Ukraine?"<sup>16</sup> - an initiative of helping Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees through donations and fundraising, as well as creating numerous hotspots and centers across Slovakia and establishing various projects centered on the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Slovak society.

Civil society proved to be key in helping Ukraine in the early stages of the war by responding very quickly to the invasion, gathering volunteers, and providing support at the borders. One of the notable organizations that were helping the Ukrainian refugees were [People in Need](#), [the Slovak Red Cross](#), [Pontis Foundation](#), [the Institute for Public Affairs](#), [Mareena](#), [the League for Human Rights](#) which assisted with legal support, and [IPčko](#), which provided psychological counseling on the spot or via hotlines. Despite the amazing support offered at the beginning of the invasion, the Slovak people are currently (February 2023) divided on who is responsible for the war, public opinion split between Russia (43%), the USA and NATO (39%), and Ukraine (7%). Moreover

- 68% of the population thinks that support for Ukrainian refugees should be reduced,
- 28% perceiving the refugees as a threat to society

which makes Slovakia the least welcoming country compared to other V4 member states.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these changing societal moods, the official political narrative is still strongly in favor of support for the country invaded by Russia, which has been manifested through Slovak diplomatic visits (e.g. of prime minister Eduard Heger,<sup>18</sup> head of Slovak diplomacy Rastislav Káčer, minister of defense Jaroslav Nad', minister of economy Karel Hirman,<sup>19</sup> and mayor of Bratislava Matúš Vallo<sup>20</sup>).

### 3. Civil society

#### 3.1 Main characteristics of the country's civil society

Civil society has played a crucial role in Slovakia's recent history, serving as a mobilizing force for members of the society committed to democratic values, the rule of law, and an anti-corruption environment. Despite a contentious relationship with successive governments, civil society has generated significant support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in aiding refugees from Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have a significant role in the provision of social services, advocacy for human rights and vulnerable groups, as well as watchdog activities. Cultural, sports, youth, and other organizations also contribute to the fabric of civil society, although they may be less visible than the ones advocating for democracy and human rights-related causes.

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<sup>14</sup> PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *President supports fast-tracking Ukraine's EU membership.*

<sup>15</sup> DENNÍK N. *Slovensko je štvrté v množstve pomoci pre Ukrajinu, USA dávajú viac ako celá EÚ (grafy).*

<sup>16</sup> SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION. *Together for Ukraine.*

<sup>17</sup> GLOBSEC. *Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4.*

<sup>18</sup> DENNÍK SME. *Ukraine will never forget it. Zelensky thanks Slovakia.*

<sup>19</sup> AKTUALITY.SK. *Vojna na Ukrajine ONLINE: Ministri Káčer, Nad' a Hirman navštívili prezidenta Zelenského v Kyjeve.*

<sup>20</sup> TA3. *Vallo sa v Kyjeve stretol so starostom Kličkom, riešili aj obnovu ukrajinských miest.*

However, civil society in Slovakia currently faces internal challenges stemming from deepening societal polarization, which weakens people's interest and willingness to take an active role in protecting democracy's fundamental rights. The development of a true partnership between CSOs and the public institutions is also a challenge. Slovak civil society is characterized by active engagement in a range of issues and causes, diversity and institutional independence from the government and political parties. The extent and nature of the country's civil society's involvement with the public administration depends on the governance styles and policy priorities of different governments and local authorities. Slovakia has experienced severe tensions between the government and civil society over issues such as corruption, media freedom, and the rule of law. Some vocal or well-known CSOs have been targeted and labeled by some key public figures as scapegoats, foreign agents, or ambassadors of global superpowers. Countering far-right extremism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and disinformation represents a challenge for both civil society and public administration.

### 3.2. Third sector

During the communist period, prior to the 1989 revolution, the third sector, understood as non-profit organizations, also known as the civil society sector, which operates independently from the government and the private sector, was suppressed and controlled by the state and organizations and groups were unable to operate independently.<sup>21</sup> In the post-communist period, a significant increase in civic engagement and activism was observed, with the emergence of many new organizations and groups. Slovakia's accession to the European Union in 2004 provided new opportunities for civil society organizations to access funding and resources and reinforced democratic norms and values. In recent years, the Slovak government has increased its support for the non-profit sector, including funding, resources, and policies aimed at promoting social and economic development.

The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic reports that **over 40,000 non-profit organizations were registered** in Slovakia as of January 1, 2021.<sup>22</sup> This figure includes associations, foundations but also non-profit companies some of which carry out commercial activities as well. A recent study by the Office of the Plenipotentiary found that the number of active CSOs in Slovakia is much smaller than the total number of registered organizations. Unfortunately, relevant data for quantification and comparison is currently unavailable. The official data from the public database Finstat ([finstat.sk](http://finstat.sk)) states, that there were 67,333 NGOs registered in Slovakia in 2021 (the number is higher than the one reported by the Ministry of Interior as this definition also includes e.g. schools, private universities or even villages in some respects), including 61,676 civic associations, 586 non-investment funds, 3,446 non-profit organizations providing public services, 111 entities with international elements, and 1,514 foundations. However, this data can at the moment only be perceived as an estimate as the real number of the active CSOs is smaller and cannot be precisely determined.<sup>23</sup>

A survey carried out by the Center for Philanthropy in Slovakia in 2020 revealed that the majority of Slovak CSOs have fewer than ten employees and annual budgets below €50,000. The report suggests that there are also larger organizations with dozens of employees and budgets exceeding

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<sup>21</sup> CENTER FOR PHILANTHROPY. *10 kapitól o vývoji a občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku.*

<sup>22</sup> MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Koncepcia rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku na roky 2022–2030.*

<sup>23</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Index udržateľnosti organizácií občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku v roku 2023.*

several hundred thousand euros without giving specific numbers as to what percentage of the sector they constitute.<sup>24</sup>

As research shows, significant growth of the civil society in Slovakia following EU accession did not lead to similar growth in citizen participation in different forms of civic engagement, particularly when it comes to formal volunteering.<sup>25</sup>

Although some CSOs supplement or even replace public institutions in providing social services, their **role often goes unrecognized**. Consequently, existing financial structures do not provide organizations with sufficient finances to ensure their sustainability and systematic development<sup>26</sup>.

Public institutions often lack sufficient knowledge or overview regarding the civil society, making **cooperation between the two sectors problematic**. As a result, CSOs have limited involvement in the implementation of different public action plans and policies. In September 2020, the Chamber of CSOs at the Council of Government for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations called for an improvement in the formal framework for negotiations and the adoption of regulations and public policies concerning civil society, in close dialogue with them in specific areas.<sup>27</sup>

There was no significant improvement in the **financial sustainability of CSOs** in 2021. Due to their dependence on project funding, most CSOs struggle to achieve financial stability, leading to a heavy administrative burden and making it challenging to build long-term staff capacity.<sup>28</sup>

Foreign funding continues to be a significant source of income for many CSOs in Slovakia, with the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) retaining its position as an important donor in 2023<sup>29</sup>.

The societal landscape of Slovakia is characterized by several controversial and divisive issues that have implications for the civil society. These include **religious and cultural diversity**, with refugee and migrant acceptance being a key point of contention (particularly considering the country's limited Muslim population). While some organizations advocate for greater inclusivity and diversity, others push for more restrictive policies. Similarly, perception of the Roma population and policies for their inclusion have also been contested.

**Pro-choice versus pro-life** remains a polarizing topic as well, as do issues related to **LGBTQ rights**, such as marriage equality and adoption rights.

The **legacy of two former authoritarian regimes**, fascist and communist, is another divisive issue. Lack of significant public debate that would allow for reconciling with the past and growing radicalization exacerbates the divide.

The **rise of political polarization** in Slovakia in recent years has also impacted civil society, with organizations and groups aligning with specific political parties or ideologies. This has resulted in

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<sup>24</sup> CENTER FOR PHILANTHROPY. *10 kapitol o vývoji a občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku*.

<sup>25</sup> MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Koncepcia rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku na roky 2022–2030*.

<sup>26</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Index udržateľnosti organizácií občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku v roku 2023*.

<sup>27</sup> MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Vyhlásenie Komory MNO pri Rade vlády pre MNO*.

<sup>28</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Ako pomáhajú mimovládky Ukrajine? Prinášame prehľad pomoci priamo na hraniciach, ale aj na diaľku*.

<sup>29</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Index udržateľnosti organizácií občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku v roku 2023*.

a fragmented civil society and limited willingness for cross-party collaboration, particularly on salient human rights topics.

These polarizing issues have a profound impact on civil society, dividing the sector and limiting opportunities for collaboration and cooperation. They also make it more challenging for organizations and groups to achieve their goals and have a meaningful impact on social and political issues. Furthermore, the use of the related agenda in the political discourse by conservative, illiberal and far-right political parties in the parliament feeds the polarization on issues of gender equality, reproductive rights, and LGBTQI+ rights.

The most recent social development of Slovakia has been shaped by several dominant factors that have greatly also impacted CSOs. These include the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in 2018, the COVID-19 epidemic from 2020 to 2022, the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, and the terrorist attack by a radicalized high school student resulting in the murder of two LGBTQ+ people in October 2022.

[The murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová](#)<sup>30</sup> sparked a significant social movement led by an informal network of activists known as „[For Decent Slovakia](#)“. Large protests and rallies demanded a free investigation of the murders, the return of the rule of law, and the investigation of corruption at all levels of society, particularly those linking political representation with various oligarchs. These events had a significant impact on municipal, presidential, European, and parliamentary elections: in the 2018 election, number of local activists took mayoral seats in big cities, including the capital Bratislava. In 2019 lawyer Zuzana Čaputová, previously known for her work as an environmental activist, won the presidential elections over a candidate from the ruling SMER - SR and in February 2020 voted for further change in the parliamentary elections<sup>31</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a new wave of solidarity and high levels of civic involvement, as well as substantial financial contributions from citizens and the private sector. This played a crucial role in mitigating the initial response of the state to the pandemic. CSOs contributed to supporting education especially for children living in marginalized communities and without access to equipment necessary for online education, especially in socially deprived communities, during the COVID-19 outbreak and worked closely with the public sector. However, the pandemic also exposed significant financial vulnerability of many CSOs, who's funding significantly decreased as funds from private resources were redirected to provide for the health-care and protection pandemic-related needs, especially in the case of ones working in the fields of culture and sport.<sup>32</sup>

The strong feeling of **solidarity with Ukraine** after the Russian invasion led to a high rise in activism and the involvement of CSOs and volunteers. The role of CSOs in activating individual donors and donors from the private sector was again crucial in providing support to refugees.

The response of civil society and CSOs in the above-mentioned crises repeatedly demonstrated the healthy and strong roots of civil society that are capable of taking up decisive, positive roles in crucial moments.

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<sup>30</sup> SPECTATOR. *Kuciak murder investigation: A Timeline.*

<sup>31</sup> BALKAN INSIGHT. *Jan Kuciak: A murder that changed Slovakia.*

<sup>32</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Ako pomáhajú mimovládky Ukrajine? Prinášame prehľad pomoci priamo na hraniciach, ale aj na diaľku.*



The long-term challenges for civil society in Slovakia include financial sustainability, the establishment of partnerships between public institutions and CSOs<sup>33</sup>, and ongoing civic engagement in favor of human rights and democratic values.

### 3.3 General public attitude towards civil society

According to the 2021 [Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index](#) report by USAID, no recent surveys have been conducted to gauge society's perception of CSOs. However, experts' opinion suggests that trust in non-profit organizations outweighs distrust, based on data from a public opinion poll for the Platform of Civic Organizations conducted by Focus agency in 2019.<sup>34</sup> However it seems that the public's positive perception of CSOs is largely limited to larger organizations that receive media attention or have active volunteers, while the breadth of civil society's activities often goes unrecognized. Moreover, the narrative presented by some politicians, such as former Prime Minister R. Fico, far-right and nationalist political parties and of CSOs being foreign agents persists<sup>35</sup>, which has led some attacked individuals to abandon their social media accounts due to the spreading of negative news and hate speech.<sup>36</sup>

The [2020 report by the Ministry of Interior](#) on the state of the nonprofit sector states that public trust in CSOs has ranged between 40% - 50% over the past 15 years.<sup>37</sup> The report attributes the highest score of 55% reported in June 2019 to the unprecedented mobilization of the society following the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová. The report also highlights a strong correlation between support for the third sector and support for institutions such as the Office of the President, the Ombudswoman for Human Rights, the European Union, and NATO. Trust towards the third sector is more prevalent among citizens who describe their situation as financially stable, are frequent users of the internet and social networks and speak multiple languages. Corruption, nepotism, intolerance and hate speech, education, and the climatic crisis are important issues for supporters of the third sector, while low income, health services, senior status, and immigrants taking job positions concern those, who do not trust the third sector.

The report by the Ministry of Interior also notes that most respondents believe that the third sector plays an essential role in addressing social and environmental issues and make a valuable contribution to society. However, some expressed concerns about the funding and transparency of NGOs, with one-third not believing in the transparency of the economic operations and 43% declaring that it "serves the interests of foreign powers".<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, while the public in Slovakia generally has a positive view of NGOs and the third sector, the data suggests that there is also some skepticism and a need for greater awareness and understanding of the role and activities that the organizations carry out.

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<sup>33</sup> KRÍZOVÝ KOMUNIKAČNÝ ŠTÁB NEZISKOVÉHO SEKTORA. *Príspevok mimovládnych neziskových organizácií a občianskych iniciatív k riešeniu korona krízy.*

<sup>34</sup> PLATFORMA HLAS. *Súhrnná správa z prieskumu verejnej mienky.*

<sup>35</sup> GLOBSEC: *From Democracy defenders to foreign Agents.*

<sup>36</sup> UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. *2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index.*

<sup>37</sup> MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Koncepcia rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku na roky 2022-2030.*

<sup>38</sup> MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Správa o stave verejnej správy za rok 2020.*

### 3.4 Active sectors and main actors

Methodologically, it is currently not feasible to evaluate the impact and visibility of civil society organizations in countering disinformation, promoting media literacy, fostering civic engagement and participation, ensuring transparency and accountability (including election monitoring), and engaging in investigative journalism, as there is a lack of relevant studies and data available. Nonetheless, there are several CSOs that are actively involved in these areas and recognizable to varying degrees within the wider society. The report at hand does not offer an exhaustive inventory of civil society organizations involved in the aforementioned domains. Instead, its main objective is to highlight the most visible and creative stakeholders, who are actively working on these topics.

In recent years numerous CSOs have launched campaigns aimed at **countering disinformation** and creating counter-narratives, including campaigns led by [Konšpirátori.sk](#) and [Globsec](#). In addition to producing studies, reports, and useful guides on related subjects, Globsec also organizes regular informal networking sessions. Other NGOs focus on debunking disinformation and promoting media literacy and critical thinking. For instance, the [Krupica CSO](#)<sup>39</sup> visits schools to provide young people with tools to identify and distinguish disinformation online. [Zmudri](#) strengthens resilience through engaging education and information on school tours, while [Youth Against Fascism](#) is dedicated to debunking disinformation and promoting truthful narratives on sensitive topics.

In the realm of **election monitoring**, [MEMO 98](#) is a well-established and vocal player with important international experience. MEMO 98 is also involved in various projects that support quality journalism, counter disinformation, and conduct media monitoring. [The Open Society Foundation \(OSF\) Slovakia](#) is another active participant in supporting independent journalism through [the Fund of Investigative Journalism \(FIŽ\)](#), established in response to the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová. OSF Slovakia also organizes a Journalism Award aimed at supporting high-quality journalism.

[The Investigatívne centrum Jána Kuciaka \(ICJK\)](#) was founded in 2018 after the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. The primary role of this civil society organization is to continue the legacy and work of the murdered journalist. ICJK conducts domestic and international projects, focuses on protecting reporters, and participates in educating aspiring investigative journalists.

Strong and well-established active players in the field of **transparency and accountability** include [Via Iuris](#), which aims to improve the legal environment of the country by proposing systemic changes in the legal system, monitoring the implementation of laws, and helping on-the-ground organizations address issues through strategic litigation and proposing solutions, among other initiatives. [Transparency International Slovakia](#)'s mission is to reduce corruption and increase transparency in institutions by monitoring those in power, advocating for solutions, and engaging people in public oversight. The non-profit organization [Stop Corruption](#) aims to reduce corruption and its negative impact on the quality of life in Slovakia. They support whistleblowers, and investigative journalism, and they also work on educating the public and raising awareness on this issue.

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<sup>39</sup> GROWNI.SK. *Krupica*.

### 3.5 Civil societies' involvement in the war in Ukraine

The Slovak civil society response to the war in Ukraine has been substantial. There has been unanimous mobilization of efforts by CSOs to provide assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. The initiative "[Who Will Help Ukraine?](#)" was formed immediately after the Russian invasion as an informal and volunteer-based movement and became a central point of coordination and an online platform. This initiative covers various forms of assistance to citizens of Ukraine who were forced to leave their homes due to the war and came to Slovakia as refugees.

Initially, civil society organizations were deeply involved in providing aid and assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. The situation has changed over time as the conflict has continued, but CSOs remain active in their efforts to provide support. Two non-profit organizations, [Nadácia Pontis](#) and [Karpatská nadácia](#), were awarded a total of EUR 1.4 million from the "Who Will Help Ukraine" initiative to run Ukraine-specific programs.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of organizations, groups, and institutions that have been most involved, the aforementioned "Who Will Help Ukraine?" initiative has been particularly active. Through their platform any resident or organization in Slovakia can offer help according to their possibilities, be it through offering accommodation, transport, material, psychological, or social support, or other forms of assistance. The platform builds a network of individuals and organizations ready to help the citizens of Ukraine and connects them directly to those in need.

CSOs working in support of Ukrainian refugees who were fleeing from war received a lot of support from individuals and companies, and this "no questions asked" support lasted for about three months after the Russian invasion. However, as time passed, the willingness of society to help gradually decreased and fatigue among volunteers combined with the worsening economic situation of the general public, set in. However, the reputation and visibility of many CSOs working in this area improved significantly during these first months following the escalation of the conflict. Some organizations even received prestigious awards. This brought greater recognition among the decision-makers, especially for larger CSOs, and led to new quality of cooperation between public institutions and organizations.

Cooperation with international donors led to an improvement of different policies, such as the prevention of sexual abuse of vulnerable individuals and other possible exploitation of constituencies. CSOs working in this area became aware that misinformation and disinformation can have dire consequences on their work, such as victimization or the disappearance of the members of the communities they serve, and placed greater importance on providing accurate information to the community.

In summary, the civil society response to the war in Ukraine has been very substantial in Slovakia. The "Who Will Help Ukraine?" initiative has been particularly significant, and several other organizations, groups, and institutions have also been involved in providing help. Informal and volunteer groups have also emerged or became active, and their work continues to be essential in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by Ukraine and the refugees.

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<sup>40</sup> NADÁCIA PONTIS. *Ako pomáhajú mimovládky Ukrajine? Prinášame prehľad pomoci priamo na hraniciach, ale aj na diaľku.*

## 4. Disinformation Landscape

### 4.1. General

Disinformation is currently a worldwide problem. It's also a major concern in European countries. According to a study done by the European Commission:

- 83% of people think disinformation threatens democracy.
- 63% of younger Europeans come across fake news more than once a week.
- 51% of Europeans think they have been exposed to disinformation online.<sup>41</sup>

It is also a major concern in Slovakia. What's more, experts identify reasons that make Slovakia more vulnerable to disinformation in comparison to other EU countries. Among the factors contributing to this situation the following can be mentioned: strong pro-Russian sentiment, associated with it - anti-American attitudes, or a higher desire for an authoritarian regime and a strong leader than in the other V4 states.<sup>42</sup>

A few conclusions emerged from surveys conducted in recent years, which received a lot of media attention. The findings include:

- From a study done in 2019 – elementary school teachers would include conspiracy websites among the trusted sources of information they would recommend to their students (57% would recommend [Hlavné správy](#), 53% [Zem a Vek](#)),<sup>43</sup>
- From a study done in 2020 – young people (16-30 years old) were prone to trust disinformation websites (57% trusted [Hlavné správy](#), 53% [Infovojna](#)) and conspiracies also reach them through teachers (up to 36% of young people heard some of the investigated misleading claims from their teachers),<sup>44</sup>
- From a study done in 2020 – 56% of respondents were inclined to believe a conspiracy claim that includes a conspiracy or a lie (the highest of the ten countries involved in this measurement).<sup>45</sup>

As much as it may seem that the problem of disinformation is well-publicized and well-known within the community of experts and CSOs working on the topic, this is not the case among the general public. This problem is not only poorly addressed, it also goes for the most part unidentified by wider society. People are largely unaware of who is the source of disinformation, who is its target, what channels and techniques are used, what are the political, economic, social impacts of it etc.

The target of disinformation is not any particular age, regional, or socio-economic group. Of course, there is disinformation that is more narrowly targeted, but in general, it can be said that anyone is the target of misleading information, and anyone can fall for victim to it. People who are spreading disinformation are not just the stereotypical individuals - poorly educated, living in the rural parts of the country etc. The case of five doctors who were assessed by the Ethics

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<sup>41</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *A strengthened EU Code of Practice on Disinformation*.

<sup>42</sup> TREND. *Potrebuje Slovensko silného a rázneho autoritárskeho lídra? Slováci odpovedali v prieskume*.

<sup>43</sup> DENNÍK N. *Hlavné správy a Zem a vek patria podľa prieskumu medzi naj dôveryhodnejšie médiá medzi učiteľmi*.

<sup>44</sup> POST BELLUM. *Tretina mladých tvrdí, že sa v škole nedostatočne venovali udalostiam 2. svetovej vojny na Slovensku. Mnohí nepoznajú fakty a veria konšpiračným teóriám*.

<sup>45</sup> GLOBSEC. *Vnímanie demokracie a konšpirácií na Slovensku*.

Commission for spreading hoaxes in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a good example.<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately there are many initiatives devoted to the fight against disinformation but a systematic solution is still missing. The Slovak state is "looking into" the topic, producing concept notes, info-campaigns and trying to adjust the legislative framework, but it often works only thanks to a few active individuals, who, often have to fight with misunderstanding on the part of the political leadership. This is also why the concrete steps taken by the state are still relatively partial and often done at an ad hoc basis. The most visible activities are carried out by the media, non-profit organizations, specific teachers, and schools – all with the help of funders.

In Slovakia, there are active projects dedicated to fact-checking political discussions (like [Demagog](#)), initiatives that collect, evaluate and rank disinformation websites (like [Konšpirátori](#)), Checkbots helping people uncover nonsense on the Internet (like [Checkbot](#)) etc. Since the target group of disinformation efforts is the general population, it is good that the activities dedicated to the fight against misinformation are also diversified – while the younger generations are more likely to get involved in e.g. the initiative of journalist [Vladimír Šnidl refuting hoaxes using Instagram](#),<sup>47</sup> the seniors can engage with the topic through „the Hoax of the Week“ (program broadcast by television Markíza).<sup>48</sup> Some educational activities target the elderly, e.g., articles and manuals produced by ESET,<sup>49</sup> others are aimed at students. KINIT (Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies) uses gamification to fight hoaxes.<sup>50</sup> Of course, many different workshops and seminars are also available. Regarding the lives of students (as visiting this event is mandatory in many schools), it is worth mentioning that hoaxes and misinformation will also be the theme of this year's 24th “[Slovak Library Week](#)” event.<sup>51</sup> However, the number of initiatives listed can be deceiving. Although there are plenty of opportunities, they reach only a small part of the population – ones already more aware of the dangers and interested in enhancing their knowledge/resilience to it.

All the organizations and projects mentioned above and many other actors take on what should be the role of the state. But for these efforts, they are often "rewarded" with negative attention from the conspirators, inclusion in their lists of "American agents," and threats (over the years, [Hlavné správy](#) has published articles about individual non-profit organizations and implemented projects - e.g. about [the Slovak Debate Association](#), [the Open Society Foundation](#) or the [Konšpirátori.sk](#) project.)

The themes that stood out most prominently and were taken up by disinformers include the same ones that are prevalent across Europe and the world - coronavirus pandemic, energy crisis, inflation, war in Ukraine). There are however also local characteristics - e.g. the signing of the Defense Agreement with the USA or the terrorist attack on Zámocká. However, it could be said that Slovakia's infosphere in 2022, apart from the Russian invasion, was dominated by domestic political issues.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> HOSPODÁRSKE NOVINY. *Aký postih čaká lekárov, ktorí šírili dezinformácie? Covidové hoaxy sú globalizované, hovorí odborník.*

<sup>47</sup> KROTIMEHOAXY.

<sup>48</sup> TVNOVINY.SK, *Hoax týždňa.*

<sup>49</sup> ESET. *6. tipov pre seniorov, ako sa nenechať oklamať podvodníkmi.*

<sup>50</sup> KINIT. *Oliver v bubline.*

<sup>51</sup> THE NEWS AGENCY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Týždeň slovenských knižníc bude aj o hoaxoch a dezinformáciách.*

<sup>52</sup> GERULATA. *Pandémiu vystriedala vojna.*

In addition to these major social issues, a number of seemingly smaller ones have recently occurred in Slovak disinformation landscape that are worth mentioning:

- the negative perception of the Slovak General Prosecutor Maroš Žilinka, who with his activity, intentionally or by mistake, helped the spread of some pro-Kremlin narratives (for example, [on the topic of the defense agreement with the USA](#)<sup>53</sup> or [the Lodomirová case](#)<sup>54</sup>);
- [blocking the Facebook account of politician Ľuboš Blaha](#)<sup>55</sup> (although he has moved to Telegram, his reach is significantly lower);
- or [the temporary blocking of the disinfo websites Hlavné správy, Armádny magazín, Hlavný denník and the internet radio Infovojna by the National Security Office](#)<sup>56</sup> (which was done in a non-transparent way and ultimately had no larger effect).

It is the latter point it's worth mentioning one characteristic: in the fight against disinformation, one must be careful about what tactics are used and what direct and indirect consequences they might have. While the effort itself to shut down disinformation websites may be seen as a good thing, how it has been implemented has drawn much doubt and disagreement also among experts.

Some objections can also be raised towards a very popular community on Facebook - [Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR](#). This specialized official website of the Slovak police has been operating since 2018 and explains disinformation that is being spread, warns against fraud, etc. They try to get closer to people – they communicate clearly, they have also set up an account on [Instagram](#), they organize the “*Hoax of the Year*” survey; and they are regularly awarded at home and abroad<sup>57</sup> (in 2021, for example, they received the “*Unique PR Act of the Year*” award<sup>58</sup>). In 2022, they published 1,429 statuses on Facebook, recorded 3,704,803 unique visitors, and were followed by 143,277 people.<sup>59</sup> Even in this case, however, there is criticism that they do it in a very tabloidized and polarizing style. It amuses those who are not fans of the disinformation scene. On the other hand it also makes change impossible not only among people who are subject to conspiracies, but also in the case of the undecided gray mass. The campaign video of the Slovak police, “[Don't believe disinformation](#),” had similar responses. It offered stereotypical images – men in balaclavas playing chess in the basement and comparing Slovaks to pawn pieces in their hands and all spoke Russian.<sup>60</sup>

In Slovakia, there are several large internal **sources of disinformation** that effectively and continuously bring these topics into the public discourse:

- part of the political scene in Slovakia (recently, a lot of misinformation, manipulation, and toxic content comes from the profiles of politically active individuals);
- the rest – a complimentary ecosystem that legitimizes and amplifies these ideas:
  - disinformation websites,

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<sup>53</sup> DENNÍK SME. *Okupačná zmluva aj plot pred ambasádou. Žilinka opäť napadol dohodu s USA.*

<sup>54</sup> DENNÍK. *Cintorín Lodomirová nie je ruský ani zničený. Nechápem, aké hanobenie chce Žilinka vyšetrovať, hovorí znalec.*

<sup>55</sup> PRAVDA. *Blahovi Facebook zablokoval po stránke aj osobný účet.*

<sup>56</sup> PRAVDA. *Štát môže dezinfowebby blokovat' až do konca septembra.*

<sup>57</sup> SLOVAK NEWS AGENCY. *Stránka Hoaxy a podvody Polícia SR je dlhodobo najsledovanejšou na Slovensku, dominantným zdrojom nepravd je META.*

<sup>58</sup> HOSPODÁRSKE NOVINY. *Poznáme víťazov PROKOP 2021. Najúspešnejšou PR agentúrou sa stala SKPR Strategies.*

<sup>59</sup> HOAXY A PODVODY – POLÍCIA SLOVENSKEJ RUPUBLIKY. *Správa Policajného zboru o dezinformáciách na Slovensku v roku 2022.*

<sup>60</sup> HOAXY A PODVODY – POLÍCIA SLOVENSKEJ RUPUBLIKY. *Neverte dezinformáciám.*

- pseudointellectuals, and failed politicians

**The dominant source of disinformation for Slovakia is META, specifically Facebook,**<sup>61</sup> but Telegram is also problematic. Although the latter has significantly smaller number of users or reach, the level of content toxicity is significantly higher (e.g., here we find actors who were kicked off other social networks). Compared to the traffic on social network, disinformation websites are quite irrelevant.

The impact and effects of disinformation in the past could probably manifest itself in gradual changes in the public mood and atmosphere, but recent years have proven that disinformation is a serious security threat. Whether we look at the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, or the terrorist attack on Zámocká, in each of these events, a clear link between disinformation and the loss of human lives can be traced. Recent research carried out by Slovak Academy of Sciences, showed that only 48% of teenagers believed true health information and news more than false information (41% considered false information as trustworthy as true, and 11% even less trusted true information than false information).<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.2. Disinformation related to the war in Ukraine

Disinformation related to Ukraine follows similar patterns to the ones described above - the same channels are used to spread it, they are aimed at the same target groups, and similar actors are behind them. [Experts confirms](#) that the same people who spread or believed misinformation about COVID-19 during the pandemic, jumped on the disinformation related to different topics during the war in Ukraine.

In a similar way, one can see the problems mentioned above affect the CSOs and actors who are engaged in helping Ukraine – their intentions and funding are questioned, they are labeled as “Soros' puppets” or “American agents”, their public support decreases, etc. As in other topics, threats began to appear, and some transfer from the virtual space to the real world. When signing the Defense Agreement with the USA, e.g., the political party SMER published photos of politicians who voted for the contract on billboards with the statement that “They betrayed Slovakia!”, which led to people gathering in front of the houses of the mentioned politicians to display their dissatisfaction (sometimes also with aggression). Similarly, in the case of the war in Ukraine, analysts of the police force faced threats, suspicious individuals moved around their residence, photos of the address and plate numbers of members of the team were published with the aim of physical lynching, etc.<sup>63</sup> The tactics of the disinformation change with time (e.g., with new platforms) rather than with a specific topic.

Of the 1429 statuses published by the Police of the Slovak Republic on their Facebook page ([Hoaxes and frauds – Police of the Slovak Republic](#)), 875 related to the war in Ukraine and explained 145 pieces of disinformation related to the war in Ukraine. The Police analysis shows that they caught many different narratives related to the war in Ukraine: they attacked foreigners who came to Slovakia; they showed Ukrainians (e.g., the image of the Banders) and NATO as the ones who caused the conflict; disinformation from the war front appeared (e.g., a hoax about the

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<sup>61</sup> SLOVAK NEWS AGENCY. *Stránka Hoaxy a podvody Polície SR je dlhodobo najsledovanejšou na Slovensku, dominantným zdrojom nepravd je META.*

<sup>62</sup> HOSPODÁRSKE NOVINY. *Takmer polovica tínedžerov nevie odlíšiť skutočnú zdravotnícku informáciu od nepravdivej.*

<sup>63</sup> POLÍCIA SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY. *Vyhrážky analytikom Policajného zboru ukazujú, prečo je dôležité sledovať oficiálne zdroje.*

massacre in Bucha); the image was built that if people want peace, they must support Russia's victory etc.<sup>64</sup>

### 4.3. Social Media Listening Tool analysis

A tool from Gerulata Technologies was used to monitor the narratives that are used for some key topics of misinformation during the last 6 months (September 2022 - February 2023). We monitored both international topics (narratives connected to NATO, the European Union, and the war in Ukraine) and topics that interested us more on a local scale (economic topics, LGBTQ+ issues, and women's rights). The monitored platforms were Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, YouTube, and various local websites. It is important to mention that the summary below only depicts narratives that include misinformation or disinformation and do not represent the general sentiments of the whole population regarding the topics.

#### **A brief overview of the main ideas that emerged:**

A strong anti-Western sentiment often appears in the narratives associated with **NATO**. The United States and NATO are portrayed as a tool of Western imperialism and domination. NATO is described as a threat to Slovak interests and sovereignty. According to different posts, NATO is deliberately trying to destabilize Slovakia. The rhetoric is nationalistic and sometimes there are posts in the Russian language. The term "high treason" often appears. Anti-Nato groups also use conspiracy theories that claim that NATO is involved in secret operations or is controlled by a group of elites. For example: „NATO is a criminal organization that only serves the US and Israel, which is not even a member of NATO.“

When tracking narratives about **NATO and the EU** through key words such as "liberal fascism", "Western propaganda" or "dictate from Brussels", the Gerulata tool showed a new type of results. These keywords often did not appear in a separate new post, but in the discussion under the post or when sharing a post from "typical" actors (television, newspapers, standard politicians). The disinformation scene shared or commented on their news, reports, posts and expressed that it was only Western propaganda, a dictate from Brussels or a manifestation of liberal fascism. Classic ideas were added to this - Soros is behind it, the media is corrupt, people are just sheep. An example of such a reaction in discussion: „Yes, Western propaganda contains a lot of hoaxes, and when they accidentally miss a hoax, they at least mislead as much as possible, because America pays them for it, and Soros pays them, so they obey and do everything according to the Western template.“

Of course, even with this topic, there were a lot of classic disinformation posts from well-known actors. In the TOP 10 posts, in terms of the number of views, they were all from Telegram - the author of the first five was a Slovak politician, Ľuboš Blaha, and the sixth was not from him, but from a disinformation site, which, however, shared his post. Blaha is known for long posts in which he connects everything to everything (the most viewed status contained 15 sub-points, the second 13).

On the subject of **the war in Ukraine**, many narratives were exchanged during the first year of the war or six-month period we monitored, but in terms of the number of posts and the number of views, the continuous discussion revived significantly at the turn of February and March 2023. The first anniversary of the war was commemorated not only by supporters of Ukraine, but also by

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<sup>64</sup> HOAXY A PODVODY – POLÍCIA SLOVENSKEJ RUPUBLIKY. *Správa Policajného zboru o dezinformáciách na Slovensku v roku 2022.*



fans of Russia. Meetings and demonstrations "for peace" took place in many cities. The main event took place in [Bratislava on March 3rd](#), following previous marches in about a dozen Slovak cities.

Among the TOP 5 creators of problematic posts regarding this topic over the past six months (according to Gerulata) we can find various platforms and actors - widely represented are politicians (Milan Uhrík and his [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) account, as well as Ľuboš Blaha and his [Telegram account](#)), the [Telegram account](#) of the disinformation website Zem a Vek and the alternative YouTube channel [zvtv](#).

Posts on topics related to the **economy, inflation, the energy crisis or sanctions** and their impact seemed more balanced. Among those that had the greatest impact and the most interactions, neutral actors and information contributions were also represented (more than in other topics) – they wrote about reasons and level of inflation, proposed solutions to the energy crisis, offered description of the scope of sanctions. However, the contributions of disinformation sites also had a different character – it cannot be said that they often misinterpreted economic information (disinformation, lies, misleading), rather they abused the situation (real numbers in connection with the fact that if we want a better future, the war must end and therefore Russia must be supported; real steps of the government connected with the fact that they are American agents who do not care about Slovakia, etc.). The most shared misinformation on this topic was that "sanctions will destroy only Europe, not Russia" and that "the COVID-19 pandemic was invented for money and to delay the collapse of the global financial system".

Another monitored topic was the **elections**. In the monitored period, misinformation appeared in connection with the municipal elections, which were held in the fall of 2022, but also in connection with choosing the date of early parliamentary elections. For keywords questioning the elections and their results (unfair, manipulated, hijacked, etc.), 7 official political profiles (of individuals or parties) were among the TOP 10 sources that contained the given words. The reach of such actors is also multiplied by the effective use of multiple channels - in the TOP 10 sources, for example, politician Milan Uhrík occupied three places (his [Facebook account](#) in first place, [YouTube account](#) in second place and [Telegram account](#) in sixth place).

The disinformation scene was not limited to Slovak elections, but (sporadically) also to elections in other European countries or the United States and (relatively widely) to the recent presidential elections in the Czech Republic. In addition to the classic insinuations that Zionists and Jews are behind it, that it is paid for through the Cayman Islands and counted by ESET, there was also a widespread conspiracy theory that it is no coincidence that Peter Pavel (Czech Republic, winning 58.3% of votes against Andrej Babiš), Zuzana Čaputová (Slovakia, winning 58.4% of votes against Maroš Ševčovič) and Emmanuel Macron (France, winning 58.5% of votes against Marine Le Pen) defeated their opponents with almost identical results achieved, but that it is all predetermined and elections are just a game.

The **LGBTQ+** topic is also a frequent target of misinformation. Hate crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals are unfortunately not uncommon, but in Slovakia such a situation usually appears in terms of hate speech. However, on October 12, 2022, a terrorist attack took place in Bratislava in front of the LGBT cafe Tepláreň on Zámocká street, resulting in the murder of two people. The terrorist attack started a debate about LGBTQ+ identity (peak lasted from October 13th to October 14<sup>th</sup>.), but it was then replaced by municipal elections, which shifted the focus to regional politics. It's somewhat surprising that the massive amount of hateful and misinformation posts related to this topic appeared so soon after two people died, as well as that the topic resonated online for only a short time before the public's attention was diverted elsewhere.

Regarding the topic of LGBTQ+ in the time after the terrorist attack and the pursuit of greater protection and legal changes, references in the form of "abuse of the topic for political goals" dominated the disinfo scene. Before the attack, posts contained allusions to "naturalness", "child rape", "pedophilia" etc. Various actors like political parties ("perverted progressives") or Zuzana Čaputová ("rainbow president") were also attacked. The LGBTQ+ topic often appeared within a single post in combination with other, seemingly unrelated, topics, for example: „*They welcome illegal migration to Europe and LGBT activists in schools. They want to destroy Russia, send weapons and impose sanctions even on European businessmen.*“

The last monitored range of topics were posts related to **women's rights**. Research findings reveal a surprising connection among the restriction of abortions, anti-vaccination campaigns, and the spread of misinformation about homosexuality in Slovakia. By analyzing the actors who discuss these topics, we have uncovered a symbiotic relationship among them, as they often intersect and reinforce one another.

One of the most prominent Facebook groups that opposes abortions in Slovakia is [slovenskydohovorzarodinu.sk](https://www.facebook.com/slovenskydohovorzarodinu.sk). This group uses language that is both misleading and dehumanizing when discussing the risks and benefits of abortion, and advocates for anti-abortion legislation and campaigns that further limit access to safe and legal abortions. This group is also against homosexuality, with its members sharing messages that are discriminatory and hateful towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The group's stance against the Istanbul Convention further underscores its conservative and traditional views. It was also found that groups that are against vaccination, such as [rizikaockovania.sk](https://www.facebook.com/rizikaockovania.sk) and [badatel.net](https://www.facebook.com/badatel.net), frequently intersect with the groups that oppose abortion and homosexuality.

## 5. Media

### 5.1 Media landscape

The media landscape in Slovakia consists of both state-owned and privately-owned outlets. The majority of TV stations are owned by private companies, as are print media, including newspapers and magazines, with the radio market split between private and public ownership. One of the biggest owners of media in Slovakia is Penta Investments, a large private equity firm that owns several media outlets; J&T which has investments in the popular commercial TV station; or Ringier Axel Springer, which owns several newspapers. The state-owned media are RTVS, a public broadcaster that operates multiple TV and radio stations, and TASR, which is a news agency. RTVS is funded by a combination of government subsidies and a fee collected from households. However, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved (and overrode the president's veto) the abolition of the fee by July 2023, with replacement in the form of a claimable contribution from the state budget, which will be valued annually according to inflation.<sup>65</sup> Both RTVS and TASR play important roles in shaping the country's media landscape and serve as sources of information for the general public. The media development is supported by the Slovak Ministry of Culture, the Slovak Audio-visual Fund, the EU, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as well as NGOs and foundations.

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<sup>65</sup> SLOVAK NEWS AGENCY. *Koncesionárske poplatky sa zrušia. Poslanci rozhodli od kedy ich nebudeme platiť.*

The television is the most followed or consumed media, with 80% of the daily penetration rate.<sup>66</sup> The most trusted television broadcaster, as well as the most trusted media source, is [TA3](#), which is a news channel that provides round-the-clock coverage of national and international events, as well as in-depth analysis and commentary. TA3 is followed by public broadcaster [RTVS](#), which provides news and current affairs together with entertainment and culture on numerous stations and radio programs. Another major television source is [TV JOJ](#), which is the 3rd most trusted television broadcaster and 8th most trusted media source. TV JOJ is a commercial TV station that provides a mix of news, entertainment, and reality shows, together with [TV Markíza](#), which is 10th most trusted medium in Slovakia, but also considered the most influential. This shows that television outlets that cover mainly current affairs are the most trusted sources when it comes to news and information. Yet, the trust in media in Slovakia declined by 4 percentage points and is now at 26% of people who do trust the media. This means that Slovakia is tied with the USA for last place out of the 46 analyzed countries when it comes to people trusting the media.<sup>67</sup>

When it comes to printed media, the most trusted are various regional or local newspapers, whose level of trust remains stable. This is followed by [Hospodárske Noviny](#) (4th most trusted media outlet in general) with daily business-focused content providing in-depth coverage of the economy, finance, and corporate news. The 6th, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9th most trusted media are [Aktuality.sk](#), one of the largest and most popular online news portals in Slovakia, covering a wide range of topics including politics, business, culture, and sports; [Pravda](#), which is the oldest daily newspaper and provides a mix of national and international news as well as opinion and analysis; and [SME](#), which is a leading daily newspaper that is known for its independent and critical coverage of political and social issues and is considered the most widely read newspaper. SME is then closely followed by the similar [Denník N](#), which is also a daily known for its investigative reporting and critical coverage of political issues and is often labeled as the most liberal media in Slovakia. Besides these, another very influential media outlets are [Plus 7 Dní](#), [topky.sk](#), and [Nový Čas](#), tabloid-style newspapers that cover a mix of celebrity news, entertainment, and current events.<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that Slovakia also has popular disinformation portals such as [Hlavnespravy.sk](#) and [Zem a Vek](#), with Hlavnespravy.sk labeling themselves as conservative media, and Zem a Vek presenting themselves as independent journalism. These disinformation portals are easily accessible, despite the fact that in 2022, the National Security Office (NBÚ) shut down several conspiracy portals, including Hlavnespravy.sk, for a few months, according to the Cyber Security Act. The ban has, however, been lifted, and the portals are functional again.<sup>69</sup>

The media landscape is mostly presenting itself as neutral, with several outlets clearly labeled as liberal or conservative. The more liberal outlets are Denník N, SME, and often also Týždeň. The conservative media, usually also labeled as Christian, are a daily [Postoj](#) or [Štandard](#), commenting on political or cultural issues. These liberal and conservative outlets are often standing against each other, commenting, criticizing, and occasionally attacking each other. Yet, Postoj is accepted as conservative but objective daily newspaper, while Hlavnespravy.sk is considered to be a disinformation portal.

The main media regulatory mechanism in Slovakia is [the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission \(RVR\)](#). The RVR is an independent body that is responsible for regulating and supervising the electronic media in Slovakia. The RVR oversees and issues the licenses for

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<sup>66</sup> MEDIA LANDSCAPES. *Slovakia, Television*.

<sup>67</sup> DENNÍK N. *Dôvera obyvateľov Slovenska v médiách klesla, v prieskume Reuters skončili spolu s USA na poslednom mieste*.

<sup>68</sup> PRAVDA. *Ludia sú zo správ unavení. Aká je dôvera k médiám na Slovensku?*

<sup>69</sup> EURACTIV. *Slovakia shuts down popular conspiracy website*.

broadcasting and retransmission and is also responsible for ensuring that media outlets follow applicable laws and regulations, including those related to media ownership, content, and media pluralism. The RVR can impose sanctions on media outlets and can also carry out investigations. The RVR also works to promote media literacy and media education and provides funding for media development in Slovakia as well. It consists of the following: the Council which is the decision-making body with members appointed by the President of the Slovak Republic; the Plenum which is the consultation body to the Council; the Secretariat which is the administrative body; the Licensing Committee; the Content Committee which is responsible for reviewing complaints and making decisions on whether or not media content is according to laws and regulations; and the Monitoring Committee which is responsible for monitoring whether media outlets follow the laws and regulations.<sup>70</sup>

## 5.2 Media freedoms

When it comes to media freedom and the changes over the last few years, there have been major concerns recently. The journalists have faced pressure and a hostile environment, which found its tragic culmination in the 2018 murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak (and his fiancé), who was investigating Slovak government officials and corruption in Slovakia. This has also raised questions about the rule of law in Slovakia and led to large protests against corruption and censorship across the country. As a result of the protests and significant public reaction, there has been a change in government, as well as increased efforts to address the issue of media freedom. Yet, the journalists still face challenges and personal attacks. It was reported that 66.2% of journalists faced attacks or threats in the last 12 months. Moreover, 47% of journalists claim that the number of attacks has risen in the last 5 years. The most common forms of attacks are personal or online verbal attacks (76%), threats and intimidation (15%), and physical attacks (4%).<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, media freedoms are protected by the Constitution and a strong Freedom of Information Act. There have also been promises from the government side to increase media transparency regarding funding and ownership, financial and editorial independence (which is often a problem since Slovak media tends to be vulnerable to interests unrelated to journalism) and reduce prison sentences for defamation. The implementation of these promises has been, however, slow.

## 6. Digital inclusion

### 6.1. Media literacy

It is difficult to monitor the level of media literacy since many measurements are carried out in parallel, containing different monitored parameters and thus providing different results. Some are based on international methodology and offer the possibility of comparing Slovakia with other countries; others are local and operate with local specifics, even at the cost of missing the possibility of comparison. Consequently, it is all the more crucial to know the methodology of the given research when interpreting the results.

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<sup>70</sup> COUNCIL FOR BROADCASTING AND RETRANSMISSION. *Basic information*.

<sup>71</sup> DENNÍK N. *Dve tretiny novinárov čelia útokom, preto vzniká nový systém na ich ochranu*.

Looking at the [Media Literacy Index](#), the last available measurement (2021) involved 35 European countries, the ranking is dominated by the Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark, Estonia, and Sweden) with Slovakia finishing in 22nd place. The ranking results from several other rankings, which are valued with different weights (such as Freedom from the Press, Freedom House; Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders; PISA, OECD; E-participation Index, UN).

A common indicator of media literacy among young people is the PISA score in reading literacy, which is conducted on 15-year-old students. The measurement is carried out every three years, but the last one in 2021 was postponed due to the pandemic; therefore, we can only operate with the results from 2018. At that time, Slovakia received a score of 458, while the average score for OECD countries was 487 points. In conclusion, reading performance is not as good as the OECD average.<sup>72</sup> Chile, Greece, or Ukraine have comparable performance to Slovakia.<sup>73</sup>

## 6.2. Internet coverage and usage

The latest measurements say that the share of households with internet access in Slovakia in 2022 is 90.65% (a year-on-year increase of 0.69 and an increase of 15.21 compared to ten years ago). The share of urban households with internet access is 94.02%; in suburban households it is 91.87; and in rural households, it is 91.8%.<sup>74</sup> A closer look was brought by [the Survey on Information and Communication Technologies Usage in Households 2022](#) (which is conducted annually by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic). One of the findings was regional differences: while in the Bratislava region (the highest result), household members had access to the internet at a level of 95.7%, in the Banská Bystrica region (the worst result), it was only 86.4%.

On the question regarding "Use of the internet through any device that allows access to the internet in the last three months," other expected differences can be evidenced, specifically in terms of age (in the category under 54, the result always exceeded 90%, in the 55-64 category, the results are only 80.8% ; and in the category 65-74, only 62.5%); or economic activity (students: 99.2%; employees: 96.7%; unemployed: 77.7%). Of those who used the Internet during the last 3 months, 73.8% of respondents said that they used the Internet several times a day, and 19.2% said that they used it every day or almost every day.

The most common activities for private purposes in Slovakia include:

1. Sending and receiving emails (86,2% in Slovakia, 77% in the EU);
2. finding information about goods and services (75,3% in Slovakia, 70% in the EU);
3. telephoning or video calls (72,7% in Slovakia, 66% in the EU);
4. instant messaging (71,4% in Slovakia; 72% in the EU);
5. participating in social networks (64,8% in Slovakia, 58% in the EU).<sup>75</sup>

Reading online news sites and newspapers ranked sixth (63.2% in Slovakia, 64% in the EU). However, simultaneously, when we talk about where Slovaks get their current news, the Internet does play an important role. In their [Digital News Report 2022](#), the Reuters Institute for

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<sup>72</sup> PISA 2018. *Slovak Republic*.

<sup>73</sup> MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND SPORT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Zverejnenie výsledkov slovenských žiakov v medzinárodnej štúdii OECD PISA 2018*.

<sup>74</sup> STATISTA. *Share of households with internet access in Slovakia from 2009 to 2022*.

<sup>75</sup> STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE SLOVAC REPUBLIC. *Survey on Information and Communication Technologies Usage in Households 2022*.

the Study of Journalism states that most Slovaks get information online (79%), followed by TV (67%), social networks (58%), and print (17%).<sup>76</sup>

As for Internet searches, the trends included world political events (Ukraine, Putin), Slovak specifics (elections, NCZI, the National Center for Health Information), sport (Juraj Slafkovský, hockey at the Olympic Games, medals at the Olympic Games), and pop culture (foreign series Stranger Things and Love for Rent).<sup>77</sup>

### 6.3. Main media literacy initiatives

Media literacy has been receiving a lot of attention lately. Although it is not possible to list all the interesting things that are happening, typologically it can be concluded that:

- the state is dealing with the topic, for example by providing subsidies for projects focused on these topics<sup>78</sup> or by prioritizing media literacy in the new reform of the state education program<sup>79</sup>;
- the topic is supported by companies, e.g., by informing<sup>80</sup> or providing finance<sup>81</sup>;
- the civil sector also deals with the topic, whether through videos (like [Zmudri](#))<sup>82</sup>, competitions (like [Olympiad of critical thinking](#))<sup>83</sup>, podcasts (like [Disinfo report](#) from Infosecurity)<sup>84</sup>, tests (like those from [medialnavychova.sk](#))<sup>85</sup>, and many other activities.

## 7. CSOs needs and gaps

*Findings of this chapter were based on:*

- *four interviews CSO professionals (Michaela Pobudová - Mareena, Katarína Batková - Via Iuris, Martin Macko - Inakosť and Viliam Kaliňák - Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society);*
- *responses from 23 civil society organizations in format of a questionnaire, and*
- *on responses from seven other informants from public and private spheres in the format of a written questionnaire.*

*There is no relevant research or data-based reports that would cover specific areas of interest (media literacy, positive/alternative campaigns, communication, cyber safety and security at all.). Based on our full-length interview and further enquiries may include specific observation for illustration of these areas.*

The **issue of disinformation** has become an increasingly pressing concern in contemporary society, and civil society organizations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in addressing it. Nevertheless,

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<sup>76</sup> REUTERS. *Digital News Report 2022.*

<sup>77</sup> GOOGLE TRENDS. *Slovakia, Overall,*

<sup>78</sup> MINISTRY OF INVESTMENTS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INFORMATIZATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC. *Výzva na predkladanie žiadostí o poskytnutie dotácie v oblasti prevencie a boja proti dezinformáciám a nepravdivým správam na internete.*

<sup>79</sup> VZDELÁVANIE 21. STOROČIA. *Verejná konzultácia.*

<sup>80</sup> VÚB BANKA. *Čo je to digitálna gramotnosť a prečo je dôležitá?*

<sup>81</sup> NADÁCIA ORANGE. *Bez nástrah online – 1. ročník grantového programu.*

<sup>82</sup> ZMUDRI.SK. *Všetky naše kurzy.*

<sup>83</sup> OLYMPIÁDA KRITICKÉHO MYSLENIA. *Otestuj sa!*

<sup>84</sup> INFOSECURITY.SK. *Disinfo report.*

<sup>85</sup> MEDIALNAVYCHOVA.SK. *Testy.*

despite their valiant endeavors, the problem of disinformation is multifaceted and vast, and CSOs often encounter limitations in their ability to enact meaningful change and ameliorate the situation. Their efforts are frequently hindered by the indifference of governmental and public institutions, which neglect the promotion of media literacy and resilience to manipulation. Furthermore, political elites may exacerbate the difficulties faced by CSOs by disseminating disinformation themselves, thereby contributing to the erosion of trust in public institutions and officials.

CSOs also face consequences of **low interest of public and state institutions** to build focused and efficient education programs in **media literacy and insufficient interest and funding of resilience to disinformation** activist programs. Any existing attempts for campaigns and activities are rather isolated and insufficient at counterweight stream of disinformation in social media and its spread by some politicians<sup>86</sup>.

Need for systematic, **long-term communication campaigns** that would counteract disinformation and build narratives that bring and strengthen alternatives to the existing ones, is recognized by some leaders of established CSOs fighting with inadequate funding and necessary communication capacities<sup>87</sup>. As noted by the director and founder of Mareena M. Pobudova “the less people talk about refugees and immigrants, the better the work of CSOs is received”. Limited resources for campaigning furthermore decrease the capacities of organizations to effectively respond to crises. Only larger organizations built and implement communication and crisis communication strategies<sup>88</sup> with clearly defined target audiences and messages.

The need to improve **digital hygiene and personal safety** of activists and employees became pressing following the most severe years of the COVID 19 pandemic (2021, 2022) and following humanitarian crises. No thorough measures may however be implemented, yet organizations react with some types of social media detox (e.g. after the work hours) and overall place more emphasis on supporting a healthy work-life balance<sup>89</sup>.

Director of Via Iuris, K. Batkova also noted that **limited attention given to digital security**, lack of systematic hardware and software protection expose organizations to risks.

In terms of **needs**, CSOs **lack stable funding**, not just for personnel but also for communication, campaigns, and projects that would aim to cultivate understanding and involvement in areas such as countering disinformation, media literacy, campaigning, cyber safety and security and digital transformation related issues. The initiatives of CSOs tend to be one-offs, and they lack senior and capable people with the appropriate skill set, particularly for **campaigning**. While CSOs have adequate knowledge and experiences that could benefit society at large, they **lack the ability to disseminate** them systematically and effectively to the public.

In the domain of countering disinformation, which encompasses critical thinking, narrative creation, and campaigning, the **involvement of CSOs falls into three categories**. The first category comprises a few **CSOs established specifically to combat disinformation** and engaged in year-long projects aimed at debunking disinformation, running campaigns, and monitoring and

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<sup>86</sup> Observations made in questionnaires from informants from private and public sphere.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Michaela Pobudova, Mareena and Martin Macko, Inakost.

<sup>88</sup> As noted by various CSO leaders, including Katarina Batkova from Via Iuris. Examples may include: Open Society Foundation, Pontis, Via Iuris at all.

<sup>89</sup> M. Pobudova noted that employees of Marina gained a certain degree of immunity to online hate speech, meaning that not every hate speech message received has a powerful or significant effect on their psychological well-being.

informing about different activities within the disinformation scene, including [Konspiratori.sk](#), [Science helps](#), [OZ Mladí](#) et al. The **second category consists of CSOs with a wider mission that are occasionally involved in creating significant and engaging educational activities**, such as [the Slovak Debate Association](#), [Zmúdri](#), [OSF Slovakia](#), etc. The last category comprises a vast number of **CSOs that are not active in this area** due to various reasons, while this category comprises majority of organizations, examples include [Cyklokoalicia](#), [Akadémia veľkých diel](#), [Záchrana hradu Šášov](#). The majority do not consider this problem as an essential aspect of their mission, including CSOs working with communities significantly influenced by disinformation, such as refugees and LGBTQI+. Some CSOs fear active involvement, campaigning, and possessing a clear and loud public voice, as they feel vulnerable and are unwilling to take the risk of attracting more negative comments and possible attacks. These CSOs fear attacks from disinformation spreaders and are unsure if they can withstand often hostile discussions on sensitive issues.

It is of the utmost importance that civil society organizations from various sectors actively participate in the fight against disinformation, as it has significant implications for numerous socially relevant issues. For instance, patient organizations play a pivotal role in combating disinformation in the medical field, as they frequently interact with patients who are frequently targeted by various false information and hoaxes regarding drugs and the treatment of severe illnesses. Similarly, CSOs that work in areas characterized by sensitivity and polarization, such as LGBTQI+ rights and the integration of Roma and migrants, require systematic and sustained campaigns to counter disinformation and promote awareness, understanding, and attitude change among wider populations.

The present lack of recognition regarding the significance of responding to disinformation highlights the necessity for awareness-raising endeavors that explain the importance and perils of disinformation and cyber security. This could be followed by a series of training initiatives that enable CSOs to create and implement some level of communication and campaigning as a routine component of their program activities, as well as enhance their cyber security.

Great need of CSOs is the ability to attain substantial funding that would allow them to hire and train staff in areas of communication and cyber protection, run projects and campaigns, and have resources for developing protocols that would increase their **cyber security**. Notably, limited grant opportunities are available in this area, primarily from telecom communications companies such as O2 and Orange.

Combating hybrid disinformation and strengthening cyber security are complex issues that involve a wide range of actors and strategies. [The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Civil Society](#) recognizes the growing threat of disinformation campaigns and the possibility of cyber-attacks and is currently organizing a series of meetings with different CSOs whose goal would be to brainstorm and strategize possibilities of cooperation between government and CSOs.

Civil society organizations are advised to consider fostering collaborative relationships in order to enhance their ability to combat disinformation. Through such collaboration, CSOs could achieve greater efficacy in addressing this issue. Incentivizing this trend could be possible through the support of donors who may encourage cooperative efforts among these organizations.

However, the need to counter disinformation is becoming increasingly urgent, and it is essential that the government and public institutions recognize its importance. Despite some efforts to address the issue, the public service's attempts to counter disinformation have thus far lacked the speed and volume necessary to reach a wide audience. In addition, civil society organizations face challenges in achieving recognition and equitable partnership status with public institutions.



In response to the increasing number of instances of disinformation and the significance of its impact on public opinion, the government is currently developing a policy document on strategic communication that includes topics related to countering disinformation. While it is anticipated that the document will be completed soon, its adoption by Parliament during the current pre-election period is uncertain. The outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections in September 2023 could also significantly impact the government's approach to countering disinformation.

To conclude, civil society organizations face multiple challenges in countering disinformation, particularly in terms of developing effective campaigns and disseminating information to the wider public. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of knowledge and training in these areas, as well as limited funding opportunities for communication and cyber protection. Moreover, CSOs are often reluctant to engage in public campaigns due to concerns about vulnerability and negative backlash.

When it comes to the needs and challenges of front liners involved in the effort of supporting Ukraine, the situation is a bit different. After experiencing significant growth, many organizations supporting refugees from Ukraine are now faced with the challenge of sustaining their programs, funding, and personnel. Working in the field of disinformation is becoming part of their agenda, partly due to collaborations with international donors. However, the budgets allocated for communication campaigns are fairly limited, as most of their resources and efforts remain focused on direct work with the community. These organizations would greatly benefit from support in developing effective narratives and campaigning to better address the issue of disinformation.

## 8. Technology and tools

In Slovakia, there is no regular measurement that would give an answer to the question of what tools and solutions would benefit CSOs, activists, and front-line workers in the field of digital technologies and the fight against disinformation while covering a large number of actors or even enabling year-to-year comparisons and monitoring of long-term developments.

With the help of several qualitative interviews with representatives of a few non-profit organizations, and a questionnaire that we sent to other organizations, we had a chance to get a picture of at least some of the relevant actors. Although we cannot speak of a representative sample, more than two dozen organizations were able to convey some insight into the topic. The organizations that participated in the questionnaire were an interesting mix in terms of:

- **Size:** represented organizations consisted of small organizations (up to 5 people), medium ones (6-15), but also, by Slovak standards of the non-profit sector, relatively large organizations (over 15 people);
- **place where they are based or where they work:** 5 self-governing regions were represented;
- **degree of threat regarding misinformation:** organizations that are dedicated to areas in which they are often the target of attacks or misinformation (LGBTQ+, aid to Ukraine, the Roma, the climate), but also those that are currently not primarily threatened by this topic (volunteering, technologies, bicycle transport, children).

Despite the diversity of the organizations involved, there was agreement on some issues. When asked how big a threat they consider disinformation to be to their organization specifically, the difference in their focus and target group was reflected in their answers (on a scale from 1 [non-existent/insignificant threat] - 10 [high threat], the average response was 6.7). To the question

regarding whether they consider disinformation to be a current threat to Slovakia in general, the average answer was 8.9.

The fact that misinformation is a threat to civil society has also been shown in other questions. We asked them if they had experienced any misinformation directly related to their organization:

- Up to 66% of the surveyed organizations had experience with disinformation related to the thematic area in which they operate.
- 52% of the surveyed organizations faced misinformation regarding their funding;
- 42% of the surveyed organizations faced misinformation regarding their origin and functioning;
- and 42% of the surveyed organizations said that some misinformation was about the people who work in the organization.

Organizations have expressed an interest in learning and improving in various areas of strengthening resilience and combating disinformation. However, more than 60% of them stated that they had not yet completed any education with such a focus. They were most interested in the following topics: **positive narratives, argumentation, new trends in the world of disinformation (AI, ChatGPT) and crisis communication.**

In addition to this area, more technical topics also proved necessary. Not all organizations have resolved issues such as secure password management, two-step verification (at least for key accounts), regular backup of documents, or updates, and even those that have taken some steps in these areas mostly report room for improvement. In none of the asked categories did satisfaction with the solution to this topic in the organization exceed 30% (and, for example, with the topic of password security, satisfaction was only at the level of 5%).

One of the problems cited by the civil sector as limiting its pursuit of this kind of improvement (knowledge, hardware, and software) is the question of finances. These are often items that they cannot include in project applications and therefore have to decide whether they have a way to cover them from other sources (if they have other funding sources at all). However, it should be added that the possibilities for non-profit organizations to submit projects for their organizational development have recently been increasing.

Based on the interview with an expert on the topic of technology, three generalizable observations were made (not only) towards the civil sector, which he recommends that we think about.

- The resulting setup is always a **trade-off between usability and security**. When the rules are too loose, there are unnecessary risks; when they are too strict, people tend to circumvent them.
- Rules and measures (purchase of things, training, setting up processes) should be set up reasonably. It's good to **be cautious, but not paranoid**. It's good to think about what the threats are and what the vulnerabilities are (Is it sensitive data? What are the key accounts on social networks? Is the organization based on a good reputation?) and then think about security topics based on these answers.
- **It is primarily about education and behavior** (do not click on unknown links, do not open strange attachments in emails, know the principles of a strong password, recognize the signs of phishing).

## Attachment No. 1 (Experts interviewed as part of the Mapping process)

- Viliam Lisý (Assistant Professor at the AI center, Czech technical university in Prague)
- Michaela Pobudová (Mareena),
- Katarína Batková (Via Iuris)
- Martin Macko (Inakosť)
- Viliam Kaliňák (Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society);
- Filip Struhárik (Denník N, member of the evaluation committee of the [Konšpiratori.sk](https://konspiratori.sk) project and author of the book "What's new in the media")
- Vladimír Šnidl (Denník N, disinformation expert, Instagram account [Krotíme hoaxy](https://www.instagram.com/krotimehoaxy)).
- Tomáš Kriššák (Information security expert)

## Attachment No. 2 (Footnotes)

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