

Research and Data Needs of Civil Society Organizations

**Exploratory internal study of ISAR Ednannia
Conducted June-July 2020**

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About the Research

In the frame of the Ukrainian Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity, ISAR Ednannia has conducted a study of the CSO data and research capacity and needs.

The study was conducted in June-July 2020 and is exploratory by nature. Its main purpose is to identify points of intervention to design adequate research capacity building programs targeted at strengthening the analytical skills of CSOs and promoting evidence-based decision making in the sector overall.

Research Results

Description and Purpose

The research initiated by ISAR Ednannia in the scope of Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity¹ implemented by the Consortium of ISAR Ednannia (Ednannia), Center for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) and Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR).

The research is aimed at the first assessment of research and data needs of the civil society of Ukraine, as well as provide initial information on how the available data and research materials are being used by the civil society organizations to date. The results of the research are to be used in the further planning of the Activity in the frame of conducting additional research or educational activities for CSOs.

The research is exploratory by nature. The data are collected via mixed methods: a non-representative survey, convenience sampling; and in-depth interviews with CSO and think tank professionals. The survey is a mix of close and open-ended questions. Mostly, the close-ended questions are aimed to harvest the quantitative data on self-assessment when it comes to data and research needs and skills. The open-ended questions are aimed to provide additional context.

The research is not representative, meaning its findings do not describe the totality of civil society organizations; however, its findings may be treated as hints and intuitions in planning Activity's interventions.

Table 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics on the survey sample. As it is seen, the total number of respondents¹ is N=61 organizations operating either in every region of Ukraine, transregionally, or national CSOs on the all-Ukrainian level, selected via convenience sampling method.

Table 1: Types of Respondents' Organizations

¹ Hereinafter—Activity

Organizations	N	%
Public Associations	47	77.05
Charity Organizations	5	8.20
Charity Foundations	1	1.64
Civic Union	3	4.92
Other	5	8.20
Total:	61	100

Table 2: Geography of Respondents' Operations

Region	N	%
Cherkasy	1	1.64
Chernihiv	2	3.28
Chernivtsi	1	1.64
Dnipropetrovsk	4	6.56
Donetsk (controlled territories)	3	4.92
Ivano-Frankivsk	2	3.28
Kharkiv	3	4.92
Kherson	3	4.92
Khmelnyskyi	1	1.64
Kirovohrad	2	3.28
Kyiv	0	0.00
Kyiv city	8	13.11
Luhansk (controlled territories)	5	8.20
Lviv	3	4.92
Mykolaiv	2	3.28
Odesa	2	3.28
Poltava	3	4.92
Rivne	2	3.28
Sumy	0	0.00
Ternopil	1	1.64
Vinnytsia	1	1.64
Volyn	0	0.00
Zakarpattia	0	0.00
Zaporizhia	2	3.28
Zhytomyr	3	4.92
All Ukrainian	7	11.48
Total:	61	100

Research Results

Research and Analytical Skills

The survey composition is divided into two thematic blocks:

- Overall experience with data and research: in this block, the respondents shared information about their usual data and research routine.
- Data and research capacity: in this block, the respondents provided self-assessment of their in-house data and research skills.

As it is seen on Figure 1 below, when planning projects or activities, the respondents use the variety of available data sources. The respondents tend not to outsource the research to professional research organizations, with it being the least popular source of data collection. Such situation might be caused by its costs, which tend to be significantly higher. Hence, the respondents tend to rely on their internal capacity to collect data from different sources. Such situation raises the issue of analytical capacity to effectively process the data collected via other mentioned sources via adequate qualitative and quantitative data analysis tools, e.g., content analysis, case studies, sentiment analysis, statistical analysis, etc.

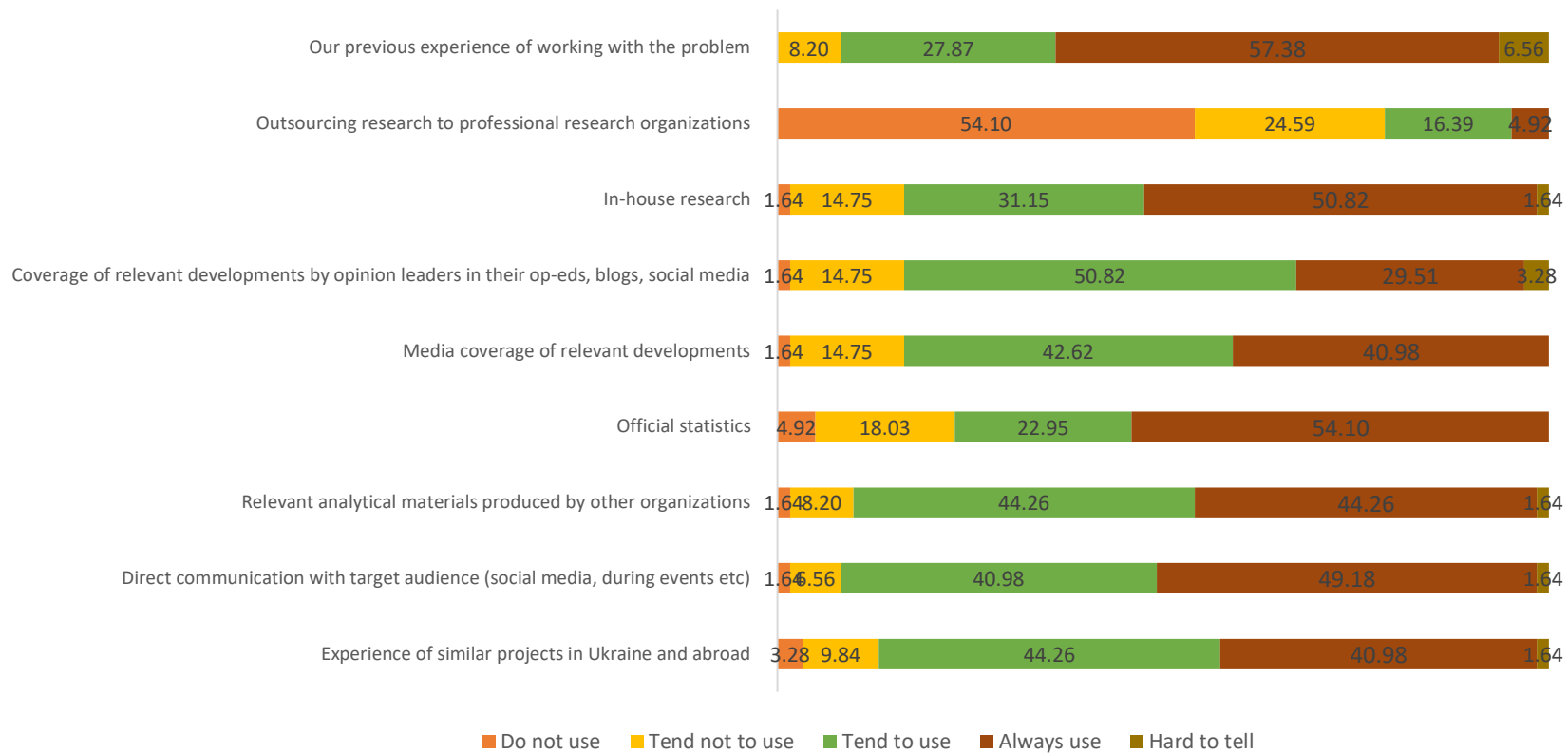


Figure 1 – Sources of Information Used for Project Planning and Activities, %

Following the data on Figure 1, the participants of the in-depth interviews (hereinafter—the interviewees), question the efficiency of having an in-house research team, as such skills “*are quite pricy*” for the organizational budget. However, to properly disseminate research results requires yet another budget expenses, now for communication and / or advocacy.

The following Figure 2 represents the respondents’ responses about their research and analytical skills. As it is seen, most respondents feel they have capacity to develop data collection tools (63.93%); however, the percentage of those who claim to understand the principles of research design, a fundamental skill in research and data capacities, is smaller (42.62%). Such results suggest two possible conclusions:

- a) some of the respondents do not see / understand the connection between the development of a research design and its logic AND how it impacts the design of data collection tools and subsequent modes of data analysis;
- b) Some of the respondents have certain data collection tools design skills, however, do not feel confident enough to claim they understand the research principles.

The data shown on Figure 2 also speaks about the level of analytical skills, which are rather low among the respondents: the qualitative and quantitative methods of research in terms of the methods of navigating the collected data score 21.31 and 24.59 % respectively. Such situation suggests the following hypothesis: ***the respondents tend to have certain knowledge on how to collect data, but not how to read them.***

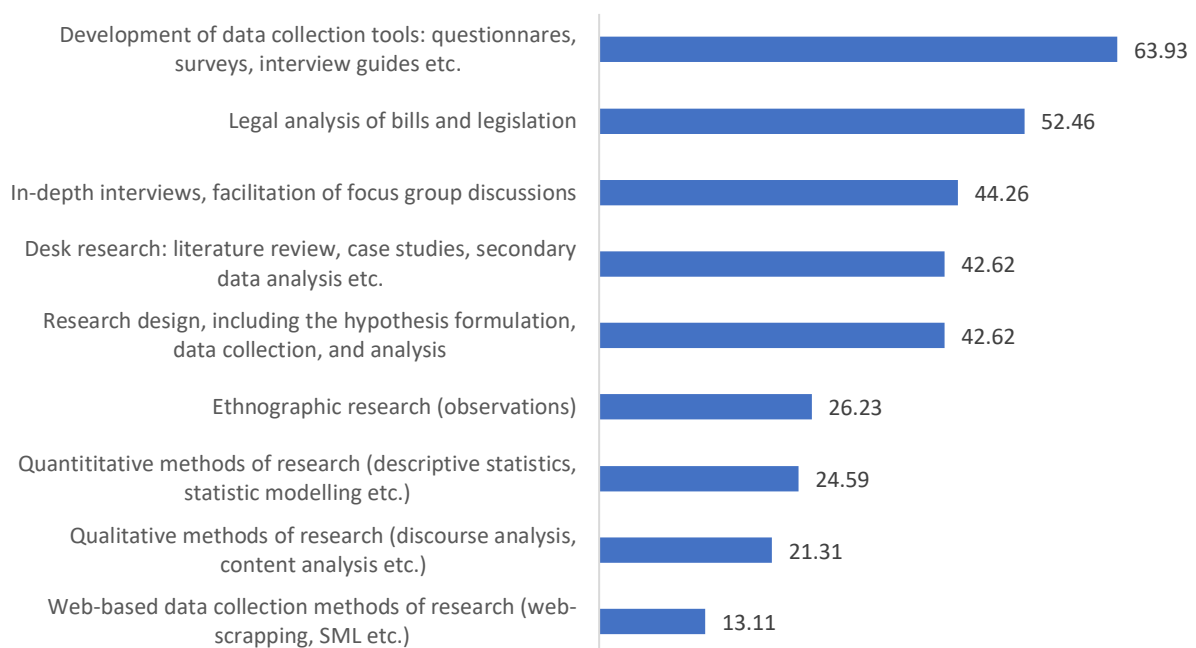


Figure 2 – Claimed Research and Analytical Skills of Respondents, %

Considering the data shown both on Figure 1 and 2, it might be suggested that overall, the level of in-house research and analytical capacity is mediocre and focused around collecting qualitative data.

Another noticeable feature of usage of sources of information is trust into opinion leaders. As it is seen on Figure 1, approx. 80% of respondents tend to use or use information provided by the opinion leaders. In the light of rather low skillset when it comes to reading the

presented data and fundamentals of research, it poses certain dangers of blind trust to authoritative sources, such as opinion leaders, and all the consequences that come with it. Partially, the data presented on Figure 3 compliments these data with additional findings.

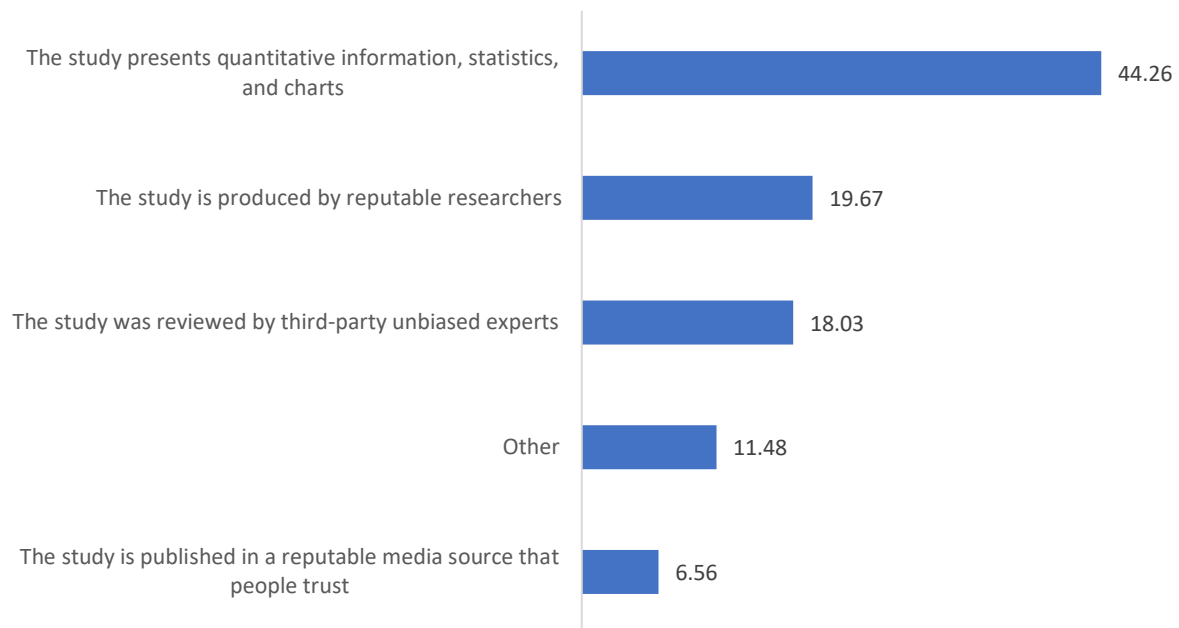


Figure 3 – Defining Feature of a Trustworthy Research, %

As it is seen on Figure 3, 44.26% respondents see the availability of quantitative information, statistics and charts as a defining feature; also, 54.1% of respondents claim to always use official statistics in their planning (see Figure 1). However, considering the fact that only 24.59% claim to be able to read and analyse statistical data in some sense (Figure 2), such finding suggests that only limited number of respondents are able to distinguish a legitimate statement supported with quantitative data from manipulations with numbers. This particular finding and awarding numbers and charts with some sort of epistemic superiority over other types of knowledge also speaks to the fact the respondents have limited understanding on advantages and disadvantages of various types of data and their purposes. The academic golden standard of research trustworthiness—a revision by third-party unbiased experts—scored only 18.03 %. Moreover, in the Other category, some respondents claim that a trustworthy study should be reviewed by an *interested* party, or be produced *only with their direct participation*, “to ensure that the research technology is correct”. Such findings demonstrate the lack of understanding of research procedures and methodological fundamentals.

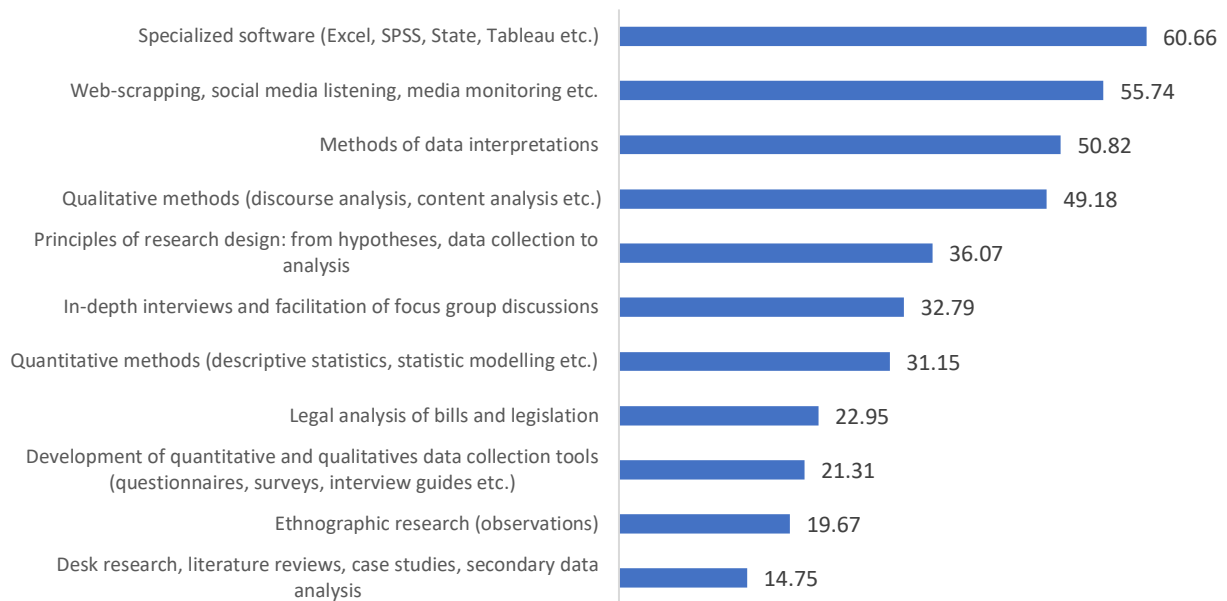


Figure 4 – Lack of Research and Analytical Skills of Respondents, %

Figure 4 shows data on respondents’ lack of research and analytical skills they see as beneficial in their activities. As it is seen, skills to use specialized software are most demanded. Digital research methods are also claimed as desirable. However, it must be noted that using both of these skillsets require prior knowledge of methodology and research fundamentals. As for data interpretation methods (in general), they are also outlined as necessary for more effective work of the respondents—this particular line leads to a hypothesis posed earlier in the report that the respondents may know how to collect data, but not how to read or interpret them.

During in-depth interviews, the participants pointed out the necessity to design data and research capacity building programs targeting different CSOs as per their current skill level. As of now, the interviewees express their discontent with the current ‘one size fits all approach’ when it comes to such trainings and workshops. This problem is especially acute for more advanced think tank professionals, who seek further professional growth—*“now, as such trainings target beginners, we are left on our own”*.

Data Needs

As it is seen on Figure 5, the respondents report either lack of information or limited access to it. Only 11.48% of respondents claim that they have enough information required for their project or intervention planning.

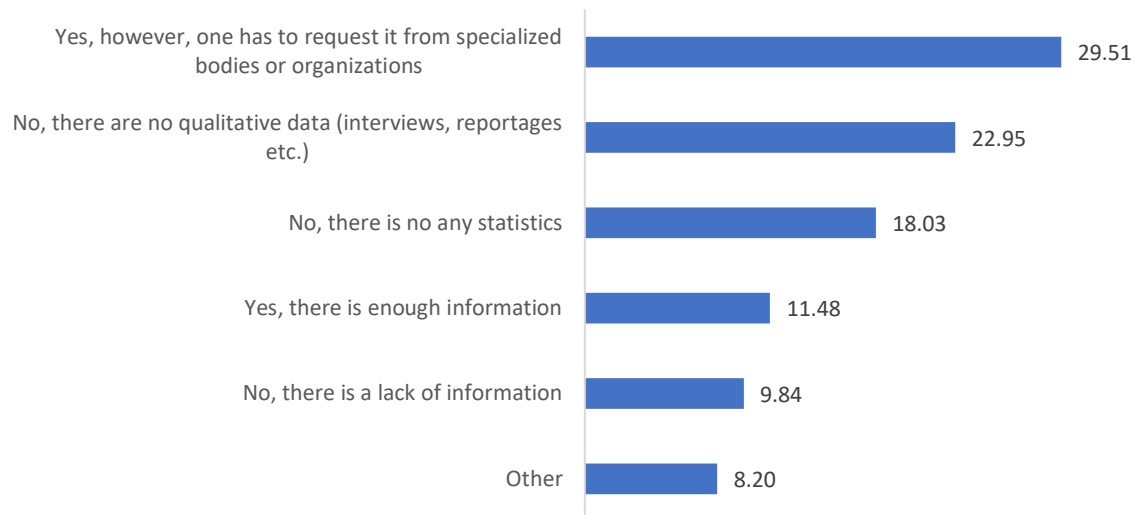


Figure 5 – Lacking Information, %

As the respondents report the lack of qualitative information, one may hypothesize that there is not enough contextual data, providing certain answers to Why and How questions. When reporting certain data needs, the respondents tend to outline the segregation of data by various categories, e.g., gender, IDP / veteran statuses, ethnicity or other project-specific categories. Also, there is an acute need to have data on amalgamated hromadas (various aspects of their functioning), cities, and villages. Those organizations who have more experience with various data, advocate access to them in the following manner:

- Data must be available in machine readable formats
- The responsible bodies must publish data following the standards of open data
- There must be a culture of publishing data on a regular and timely manner by business entities and state agencies

As for the data on organizational development, only few respondents mentioned their research and data needs in this domain. The needs mainly are concerned with the skills of coherent project development (logical framing) and audience profiling. However, the respondents are more focused on information that will advance their interventions, not internal organizational developments.

Figure 6 presents the data on how respondents build their research and analytical capacities and what strategies they prefer.

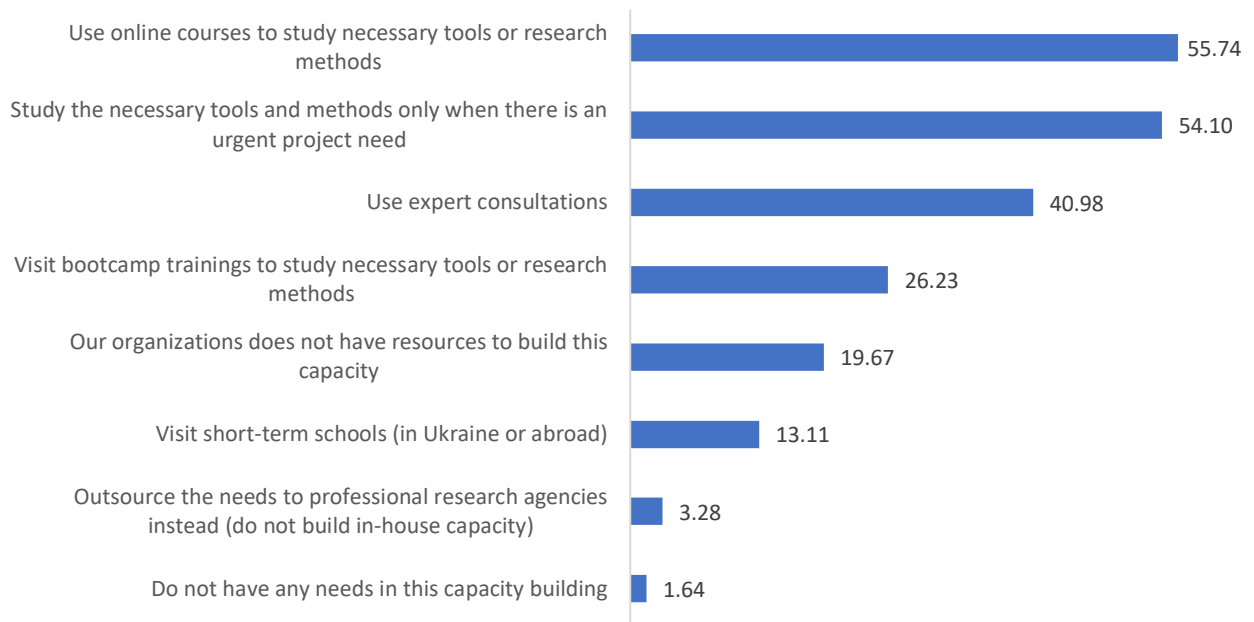


Figure 6 — Internal Research and Analytical Capacity Building, %

As it is seen on Figure 6, only 3.28 % of respondents prefer to outsource their research needs to professional organizations, regardless of reasons. Other respondents see research and analytical capacities as in-house features, which then are being built via various approaches—55.74% prefer online courses, 54.1%—dive into research methods only when a project requires such skills.

It is also apparent that 40.98% rely on expert consultations, which coincides with the dependence on opinion leaders when collecting necessary data for the project planning. Considering the reported “serious lack of analytics” by respondents, such situation accents the significance of developing profound expertise in / among the civil society.



Figure 7 — Preferred Ways to In-House Research and Analytical Capacity Building, %

The data on Figure 6 is complemented by data on Figure 7, which presents the preferred ways to build the in-house research and analytical capacity. As it is seen, respondents see mentorship as one of the most adequate ways to develop the necessary skills, and this finding is also complimented by the data on needs to have access to consultations. The knowledge itself is preferred to be consumed via online courses / webinars and access to study materials (guides, textbooks etc.). To summarize, it seems that the most desirable mode is to have a supervised online course.

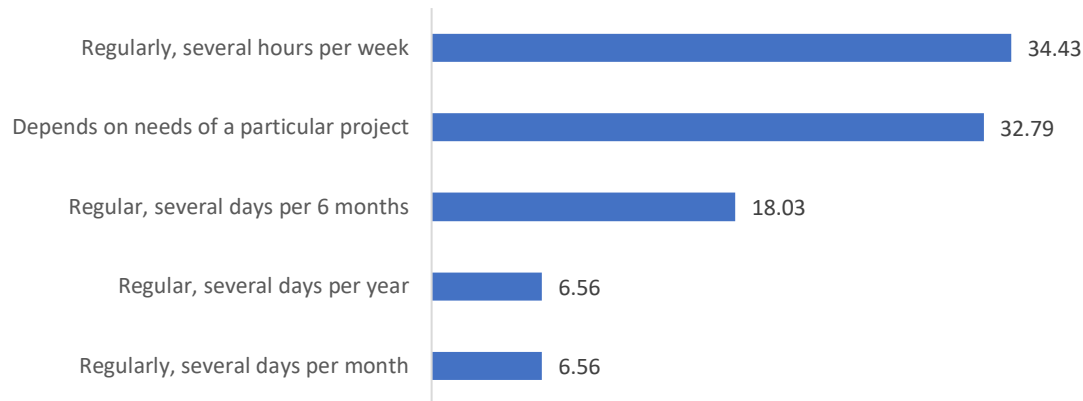


Figure 8 — Readiness to Dedicate Time to Research and Analytical Capacity Building, %

At the same time, Figure 8 shows some respondents’ claimed readiness to commit several hours per week for building these capacities—34.43%. However, 32.79% are ready to develop this skillset only when a particular project requires certain knowledge, which is a signal that research and analytical skills are perceived as *‘situational’* and not necessarily useful in presumed daily operations.

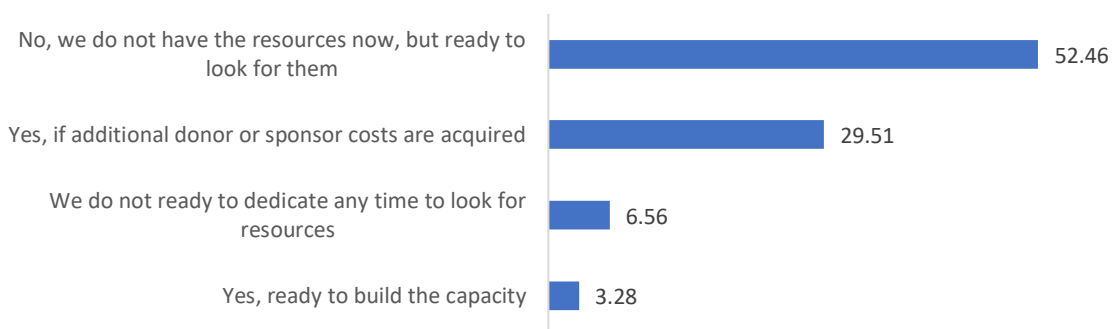


Figure 9 — Resources to Build the Research and Analytical Capacity, %

Figure 9 shows the respondents’ readiness to find resources (financial ones and time) to build the capacity. 52.46% do not have any resources at the time but are ready to look for them if necessary. Almost 30% are ready to start learning only if they have additional resources from donors or sponsors.

One of the interviewees noticed that some donor programs are designed in the way that *“feels like discouraging from any sort of thinking or analysis”*, if the program **is not** targeted

to think tanks but to activists in a broader sense. This distinction between activism and think tanks may be an expression of a Western view on civil society and think tanks in general as separate entities, as the latter tend to have contracts with industries and government while the former is more of action centers. In Ukraine, however, the think tank culture is a native to civil society

Conclusions

- The first and the most important conclusion: the respondents and sector overall (as of the in-depth expert interviews) tend to underestimate the complexities of the research process and philosophy backing its procedures. One of the interviewees labelled it as “unrecognizable incompetence”, meaning quite often the CSO professionals do not know that they do not actually know a certain topic in depth.
- The respondents rather rely on in-house research and analytical capacity than delegate research to professional research agencies. This may be due to high costs and prolonged timeframes when outsourcing research to third parties. However, the interviewees point out that not many CSOs may afford to have a research / analytics staff, as they are heavy on the budget as well, also because such staff is the hardest to fundraise funding for.
- In their preparation and planning of projects and interventions, the respondents tend to rely on their previous experience of working with a problem and prefer direct communications with the audience. Although other sources of information are also being used, two former mentioned are the most common ones.
- The respondents claim to have a capacity to design data collection tools; however, there is a lack of knowledge on research design, which is a fundamental skill in the frame of research and analytical capacities. Therefore, one may hypothesise that the respondents do not see or understand how the research logic impacts the data collection tools. Such misunderstanding of the research fundamentals also impacts the capacity of respondents to read data, meaning they have weak data interpretation skills.
- 80% of respondents tend to use information provided by opinion leaders in social media or opinion pieces in the media. Such tendency poses a question of the expertise significance in the civil society and the quality of information the opinion leaders provide. Considering the overall impact of social media algorithms and design (e.g., advancement of controversial content generating much engagement, lowering down posts with external links, the whole content consuming pattern in the social media etc.) on content perception and visibility, the tendency also stresses the importance of ensuring the respondents understand the peculiarities of data and information presented to them in the social media.
- For most respondents, if a study presents statistics and charts, it is sufficient to claim that this study is trustworthy. Such finding demonstrates the lack of understanding the peculiarities and purposes of data types, as well as unawareness about research standards. Considering the fact that there is general lack of statistical skills, excessive trust to numbers presents possibilities of quantitative data being misinterpreted at best, manipulated at worst.

- The most desirable research and analytical skills are those of working with specialized software or digital based. However, to obtain these skills and use them effectively, understanding of research methodology and general fundamentals is a must.
- In general, the respondents report the lack of adequate information in accessible formats for their projects. The respondents see the need to have segregated statistical data by socio-demographics or project specific features, and most importantly, on the level of amalgamated hromadas. The respondents report the lack of analytical materials on their topics.
- Only a few respondents see the need of having more information on topics of organizational development: audience profiling and general project design (logframe).
- The respondents see the capacity building in the domain of research and analytics as necessary and desirable. The most preferable format is a supervised online course. In general, the respondents are ready to commit several hours per week or several days per 6 months for acquiring new skills and building this capacity. As for financial resources, most respondents are ready to look for additional funds to sponsor their education and capacity building.