Think tank state of the sector 2022: methodology note

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OCTOBER 2022

Contents

Introduction

The 'Think tank state of the sector' is an annual report that offers an overview of the think tank sector worldwide. The 2022 report is the third in this publication series.[1]

This note accompanies the report and offers a more detailed description of the methodology followed for data collection and analysis, as well as discussing the sample size.

1. All editions of the report are available here.

Organisations in the Open Think Tank Directory

Defining which organisations are to be included in the Open Think Tank Directory is a difficult task, as thinks tanks themselves are difficult to define. For the Open Think Tank Directory, we have defined think tanks as a diverse group of knowledge and engagement organisations with the (main) objective of undertaking research, generating knowledge and/or using evidence-informed arguments to inform and/or influence policy and its outcomes.

The directory has been compiled and is updated using a mixed approach: web searches on Google to find existing think tank lists and organisations; suggestions by country and regional experts; and direct submissions by think tanks. All organisations are reviewed to verify whether they fit the inclusion criteria and are then either accepted, accepted but deemed 'boundary',[2] or not accepted. Information is retrieved from think tanks' websites and, in some cases, submitted by organisations themselves.

It is important to note that the nature of the database and the information it holds make it a *live* tool. The directory does not claim to have a complete list of ALL think tanks worldwide. But it does feature a good sample, one that is continuously updated: with new think tanks coming in, defunct ones being taken out, and data being added. Thus, while the data is not perfect, the analysis of it offers an interesting overview of the trends and patterns in the sector.

Annual think tank consultation and survey

Every year, we undertake a consultation process with all think tanks in the Open Think Tank Directory for whom we have an email address. In this process, we ask organisations to update their profile information and to respond to a sector-wide survey to help understand how think tanks perceive their context, the key challenges they face, and their research agenda.

As of August 2022, there were 3,140 active think tanks registered in the Open Think Tank Directory.[3] From this total, we sent the consultation and survey to 2,885 think tanks that had an email address registered.

For the consultation process, we invited thinktankers who were knowledgeable about their organisations – from any area or department within the think tank – to update their organisational profiles. For the survey, we sought responses from senior-level staff, again from any area or department (see organisational role area and level). The survey was not anonymous, and respondents were asked to disclose their names and their organisations – both to facilitate cross-referencing with the information in the directory and to enable follow up questions if needed to make sense of the data. However, the data has been anonymised for the analysis. The anonymised database can be accessed here. The names of respondents who were consulted and were comfortable to share more insights on the key findings were mentioned in the report.

The time period for submitting responses was 4 May to 27 July 2022. Ten per cent of the emails bounced back, more than a third of which were linked to think tanks in East Asia. This may have resulted in a lower number of responses from this region (see 'Description of survey sample', below).

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2. Read the FAQs for a definition of boundary organisation.

3. Organisations deemed boundary or defunct were not included.
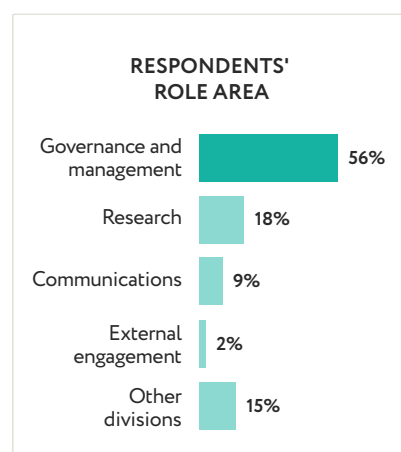
Description of the survey sample

In total, 234 thinktankers participated in the survey. The sub-sections below provide more details on the composition of this sample.

Organisational role area and level

We asked survey respondents to list their roles within their organisations. We then analysed this data and generated two categories for analysis: role area and role level. The 'role area' was created to describe respondents' area of work or organisational division and the 'role level' was created to describe respondents' level of seniority in their organisations (see Charts 1 and 2). We are aware that these categories may include responsibilities that are more fluid. We tried to account for these different responsibilities and devise a categorisation that closely reflects respondents' roles and levels in their think tanks. We also checked respondents' designations on their organisational websites where possible to group them under the most suitable category.[4]
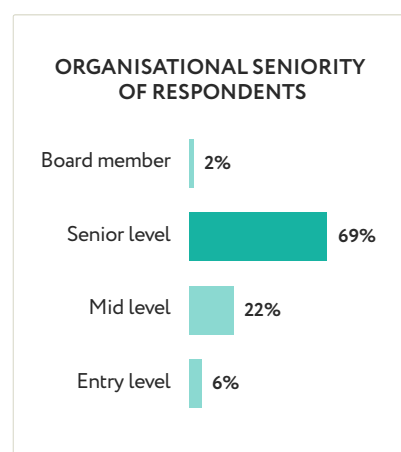
Chart 1 shows that most survey respondents (56%) were involved in the governance and management of their think tanks. Additionally, nearly 70% held senior-level positions (Chart 2). The makeup of the data shows that the responses came from well-experienced thinktankers, who are knowledgeable about their context.

Chart 1

RESPONDENTS' ROLE AREA

Governance and management	56%
Research	18%
Communications	9%
External engagement	2%
Other divisions	15%

n=234

Chart 2

ORGANISATIONAL SENIORITY OF RESPONDENTS

Board member	2%
Senior level	69%
Mid level	22%
Entry level	6%

n=234

Regional composition

A regional breakdown of the responses we received is given in Table 1.[5] Although we took efforts to obtain responses from a representative number of think tanks in each region, there was considerable variation in the number of respondents from each region. For example, there was a high share of respondents from Europe, Latin America and specific countries in Asia, but very few responses from Eastern Asia and Oceania.

Table 1

Region	Number of responses
Africa	24
Asia	63
USA & Canada	15
Latin America & the Caribbean	49
Europe	74
Oceania	9

Other variables

We cross-checked the survey responses against key variables registered in the Open Think Tank Directory for each organisation. Table 2 lists the variables we used for this exercise. It also displays the number of responses we used for each analysis based on the information we had. For example, out of 234 survey respondents, we had data pertaining to the leader's gender for 225 of those organisations.

Table 2

Variable	Responses
Gender of leader(s)	225
Date founded	213
Turnover in 2021	100
Staff number in 2021	172

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4. For more information on the organisational role and level of respondents see Annex 1.

5. Responses from the MENA region were grouped under Asia and Africa.

Weighting the sample

The survey data throughout the report is weighted. Weighting was carried out to ensure that the sample of survey responses reflected the diversity of the think tank world, and did not overrepresent different types of think tanks relative to their proportional share of the sector.

The universe of cases, or sampling frame, was the Open Think Tank Directory, which is the most comprehensive list of think tanks available globally to the knowledge of the project team. As a result, the survey responses were weighted to the sample.

The weighting took into account a think tank's region (Africa, Asia and Oceania, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, USA & Canada); age of the think tank (founded before 2000, 2000 or after, or at an unknown date); and size in terms of employee count (20 or less, 21 or more, or unknown employee count). These variables were selected as they have been correlated with responses in past waves of the study, and overrepresentation by region was anticipated due to differential levels of awareness of On Think Tanks in different regions. Further variables such as the gender of founder were not included into the weighting due to the limited sample size.

Originally, the survey was envisaged as a quota-based sample. However, the quotas were not met, meaning the data needed to be weighted (as described in greater depth below).

Table 3 provides a sense of the weighting scheme. It breaks down the data by the share of each category of think tank (e.g. think tanks in Africa, with 20 employees or less, founded in 2000 or later) in terms of:

→ Share in the Open Think Tank Directory.
→ Share of responses in the survey sample.
→ Share of responses in the weighted sample.
→ Difference between the weighted share of think tanks in a given category in the population versus the weighted data.
→ Difference between the weighted share of think tanks in a given category in the population versus the unweighted data.

A number of notes are relevant to the table. First, the sum of differences between the weighted and unweighted data compared with population-level data are quite large. While the unweighted data has a 55% point difference compared with the directory, the weighted data more closely corresponds to the Open Think Tank Directory, with only a 7% point difference. This suggests that the weighting likely made the survey responses more representative, at least for think tanks in these categories. Second, a number of categories of think tank were not ultimately reflected in the survey. This stems from a lack of responses in the following groups:

→ Latin America & the Caribbean, less than USD 500k turnover, and unknown founding date;
→ USA & Canada, less than USD 500k turnover, and unknown founding date;
→ Asia, unknown turnover level, and unknown founding date.

Given the relative benefit of weighting the data to these categories in conjunction with the relatively small share in the sampling frame of think tanks that are reflected in the above categories, the weighting scheme was maintained without further modification.

After conducting weighting to population level figures, the weights were normalised for statistical analysis, ensuring that the weighted sample size was roughly equivalent to the unweighted sample size. In turn, this does not lead to a significant increase in the apparent size of the sample to statistical software when conducting significance testing.

Table 3

Region	Size	Founding	Share in population	Share of responses in sample	Share in weighted sample	Difference between weighted share and population	Difference between unweighted share and population
Africa	<20 employees	In 2000 or later	1.15%	3.85%	1.19%	0.04%	2.70%
Asia	<20 employees	In 2000 or later	3.16%	8.97%	3.28%	0.12%	5.81%
Europe	<20 employees	In 2000 or later	5.46%	8.97%	5.67%	0.21%	3.51%
Latin America & the Caribbean	<20 employees	In 2000 or later	1.15%	2.14%	1.19%	0.04%	0.99%
USA & Canada	<20 employees	In 2000 or later	1.15%	0.85%	1.19%	0.04%	-0.29%
Africa	21+ employees	In 2000 or later	0.57%	0.85%	0.60%	0.02%	0.28%
Asia	21+ employees	In 2000 or later	2.01%	5.56%	2.09%	0.08%	3.54%
Europe	21+ employees	In 2000 or later	3.45%	3.42%	3.58%	0.13%	-0.03%
Latin America & the Caribbean	21+ employees	In 2000 or later	0.86%	2.56%	0.90%	0.03%	1.70%
USA & Canada	21+ employees	In 2000 or later	1.44%	0.85%	1.49%	0.06%	-0.58%
Africa	Unknown	In 2000 or later	1.72%	2.14%	1.79%	0.07%	0.41%
Asia	Unknown	In 2000 or later	6.32%	4.70%	6.57%	0.25%	-1.62%
Europe	Unknown	In 2000 or later	4.89%	3.42%	5.07%	0.19%	-1.47%
Latin America & the Caribbean	Unknown	In 2000 or later	2.59%	5.13%	2.69%	0.10%	2.54%
USA & Canada	Unknown	In 2000 or later	0.57%	0.43%	0.60%	0.02%	-0.15%
Africa	<20 employees	Before 2000	0.57%	0.43%	0.60%	0.02%	-0.15%
Asia	<20 employees	Before 2000	2.30%	1.71%	2.39%	0.09%	-0.59%
Europe	<20 employees	Before 2000	5.46%	2.99%	5.67%	0.21%	-2.47%
Latin America & the Caribbean	<20 employees	Before 2000	1.72%	2.14%	1.79%	0.07%	0.41%
USA & Canada	<20 employees	Before 2000	3.45%	1.71%	3.58%	0.13%	-1.74%
Africa	21+ employees	Before 2000	0.57%	0.85%	0.60%	0.02%	0.28%
Asia	21+ employees	Before 2000	3.16%	4.27%	3.28%	0.12%	1.11%
Europe	21+ employees	Before 2000	5.75%	5.98%	5.97%	0.22%	0.24%
Latin America & the Caribbean	21+ employees	Before 2000	1.15%	1.28%	1.19%	0.04%	0.13%
USA & Canada	21+ employees	Before 2000	3.74%	1.71%	3.88%	0.14%	-2.03%

Africa	Unknown	Before 2000	1.72%	0.85%	1.79%	0.07%	-0.87%
Asia	Unknown	Before 2000	8.91%	4.70%	9.25%	0.35%	-4.21%
Europe	Unknown	Before 2000	6.32%	1.71%	6.57%	0.25%	-4.61%
Latin America & the Caribbean	Unknown	Before 2000	4.89%	6.41%	5.07%	0.19%	1.53%
USA & Canada	Unknown	Before 2000	2.59%	0.43%	2.69%	0.10%	-2.16%
Africa	<20 employees	Unknown	0.29%	0.43%	0.30%	0.01%	0.14%
Asia	<20 employees	Unknown	0.57%	0.43%	0.60%	0.02%	-0.15%
Europe	<20 employees	Unknown	1.44%	1.71%	1.49%	0.06%	0.27%
Latin America & the Caribbean	<20 employees	Unknown	0.29%	0.00%	0.00%	-0.29%	-0.29%
USA & Canada	<20 employees	Unknown	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	-1.72%	-1.72%
Africa	21+ employees	Unknown	0.00%	0.43%	0.00%	0.00%	0.43%
Asia	21+ employees	Unknown	0.29%	0.43%	0.30%	0.01%	0.14%
Europe	21+ employees	Unknown	0.57%	0.85%	0.60%	0.02%	0.28%
Latin America & the Caribbean	21+ employees	Unknown	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
USA & Canada	21+ employees	Unknown	0.86%	0.43%	0.90%	0.03%	-0.43%
Africa	Unknown	Unknown	0.29%	0.43%	0.30%	0.01%	0.14%
Asia	Unknown	Unknown	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	-1.72%	-1.72%
Europe	Unknown	Unknown	1.15%	2.14%	1.19%	0.04%	0.99%
Latin America & the Caribbean	Unknown	Unknown	1.15%	1.28%	1.19%	0.04%	0.13%
USA & Canada	Unknown	Unknown	0.86%	0.43%	0.90%	0.03%	-0.43%

Open Think Tank Directory data

This section describes the sample size available for each variable from the Open Think Tank Directory included in the report. The numbers vary as each organisation is free to provide information on as many (or as few) variables as they want.

Variable	Number of think tanks for which data is available
Active think tanks	1,340
Date founded	2,781
Gender of think tank leader(s)	2,703[6]
Gender of founder(s)	1,803
Staff size	2,068[7]
Percentage of female staff in 2021	1,453
City	3,123
Country	3,140
Publications in 2021	244
Think tank turnover in 2021	159
Facebook page listed	2,352
Facebook likes in 2022	1,999
Twitter handle listed	2,261
Twitter followers in 2022	2,182
LinkedIn account listed	1,525
LinkedIn followers 2022	1,170
Instagram account listed	621
Instagram followers 2022	587
Instagram posts 2022	584
YouTube page listed	1,479
YouTube subscribers 2022	1,478
YouTube views 2022	1,479

Analysis

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The survey featured both closed-ended and open-ended questions. For some open-ended questions we conducted a content analysis and categorised the responses we received. We undertook this type of analysis for the questions about the most pressing policy issues and think tanks' approach to diversity, equity and inclusion issues.

To determine the most pressing policy issues, we asked thinktankers to list the issues they believed should be in their country's research agenda in the year ahead. We then undertook content analysis to code each issue they listed and group these responses under research categories (based on the Open Think Tank Directory research topics). This categorisation enabled us to evaluate which research issues think tanks were prioritising in the year ahead and whether these issues matched the issues generally researched in each region.

For example, if a response listed the research issues of climate change, public finance, and social cohesion, then climate change would be categorised as *environment/natural resources/energy*; public finance as *trade/economics/finance*; and social cohesion as *peace/security/defence*. See Annex 2 for the complete list of categories.

For the question on addressing diversity, equity and inclusion issues, we asked think tanks to provide examples of the types of policies and actions they had already implemented or were in the process of implementing. We then evaluated the responses of think tanks that had implemented strong policies or adopted some action. These responses were grouped under broader themes that reflected the most frequent types of policies and actions mentioned by think tanks. See Annex 3 for the list of themes.

6. The most recent year for which data was available was used for this variable.

7. The most recent year for which data was available was used for this variable.

Annexes

Annex 1. Organisational role area and seniority level of respondents

ROLE AREA	EXAMPLES
Governance and management Individuals in this category are: (1) involved in the general governance and/or management operations in the organisation and (2) are not linked to a specific work area or division (such as research, finance, IT). If they are connected to a specific work area or division, then their role area will be listed under that specific category.	→ CEO → Director → Deputy director → Board member → Secretary → Project manager → Project coordinator
Research Individuals connected to think tank divisions that conduct research and analysis.	→ Research director → Senior researcher → Analyst → Research coordinator → Research manager → Research officer → Research fellow → Academic coordinator (this varies from think tank to think tank. Some think tank structures list the academic coordinator under a different division. If so, they fall under Other organisational divisions)
Communications Individuals connected to or part of a think tank's communications team.	→ Communications head → Strategic communications manager → Editor → Communications officer
External engagement Individuals who are not full-time employees of a think tank yet occasionally work with a think tank in the capacity of an advisor, consultant etc.	→ Advisor → Consultant
Other organisational divisions This category includes all other divisions in a think tank that do not fall under research or communications but have a specific focus area. As it covers a specific focus area, it is separate from the governance and management category, which is broad and general.	→ HR → Administration and operations → IT → External partnerships → Legal department → Finance → Fundraising
N/A The area of work or think tank division was not mentioned by the respondent.	

Annexes

ROLE LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Board member Board members were listed separately from the other management and seniority levels in a think tank as they operate as a separate entity.	→ President of the board → Member of the board
Senior level Individuals holding a senior position within a think tank. Generally, senior members are consulted in daily decision-making processes. However, in some cases, they may not be involved in organisational decision-making despite their seniority (e.g. senior research fellow). For our purposes, their seniority was verified by cross-checking the organisational structure on the think tank's website.	→ CEO, managing director, president etc. → Director, deputy director etc. → Director of communications/ research/operations/administration/ external partnerships etc. → Head of research/communications/ operations/IT etc. → Senior executive → Advisor
Mid-level Individuals that are broadly part of the mid-level management tier in a think tank. Coordinators, managers and research fellows would either be mid-level or senior level, depending on a think tank's structure. In these cases, the organisation's structure was cross-checked online to determine an individual's level in the organisation.	→ Manager of HR, operations, communications etc. → Project manager → Coordinator (cross-checked with think tank website as some coordinators were senior) → Senior research fellow, senior research analyst, senior research associate etc. This was evaluated on a case by case basis depending on the size of the think tank. → Researcher, research analyst, research associate etc. → Consultant
Entry level Individuals that are broadly part of the entry level or preliminary tier of a think tank and positions below the mid-level.	→ Research officer, communications officer, HR officer etc. → Research assistant → Junior manager → Project officer
N/A The level was not mentioned by the respondent.	

Examples of organisational role area and level classification:

→ CEO → Governance and management (role area), senior level (role level)
→ Communications manager → Communications (role area), mid-level (role level)
→ Administrative officer → Other organisational divisions (role area), entry level (role level)

Annexes

Annex 2. Most pressing policy issues

CATEGORY OF POLICY ISSUE	EXAMPLES
Health	Child nutrition; financing healthcare; pandemic preparedness
International affairs/development	EU integration; foreign policy; sustainable development
Education	Education policy; access to education
Trade/economics/finance	Economic growth; public finance; debt
Governance	Civic participation; public institutions; state capture
Peace/security/defence	Ethnic conflict; war and insecurity; social cohesion
Environment/natural resources/energy	Climate change; disaster management and preparedness; water security
Law/justice/human rights	Judicial reform; improving civic space; rule of law
Private sector development	Entrepreneurship; future of work; business and e-commerce
Science/technology/innovation	Digital innovation; data privacy; AI
Social policy	Social inclusion; inequality; poverty reduction
Transport/infrastructure/urban	Urban planning; housing
Gender	Gender gaps and inequalities; women's choices
Food/agriculture	Food security; zero hunger; rural industrialisation
Media/culture/sport	Social media literacy; disinformation; media freedom
Research and policy landscape	Strengthening evidence use; research flexibility; research funding
COVID-19 impact and recovery	COVID-19 related challenges; costs of the pandemic; stakeholder inclusion in COVID-19 recovery

Annexes

Annex 3. Addressing diversity, equity and inclusion issues

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Better representation in the workplace	Improving the representation of marginalised groups; gender-balanced board
Better working conditions	Increased time-off for staff; sexual harassment policy; flexible work hours
Better research processes and engagement	Translating research into more languages to increase reach; gender-balanced panels
Other	Adhering to regional policies on diversity, equity and inclusion; drafting general policies on diversity, equity and inclusion

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