

# PORTRAIT OF SOCIAL CIRCUS



Cirque du Soleil is releasing the results of its survey of 500 identified organizations, to which over 200 social circus organizations responded. The results provide an overall view of the practice of social circus, revealing a dynamic and thriving community. Thanks to this job-creating community, over 200,000 young people around the world benefited in 2015 from a creative and rigorous means of intervention, while gaining meaningful experience.

## SNAPSHOT OF SOCIAL CIRCUS IN 2015...

**500**  
identified  
organizations  
**70**  
countries

**200,000 +**  
at-risk youth

**\$40 M +**  
invested by  
the social circus  
community

**5,000 +**  
jobs

**100**  
hours of workshops  
per participant

**5/1 ratio**  
Workshops have  
1 practitioner for  
5 participants



# PORTRAIT OF SOCIAL CIRCUS IN 2015

## COMMUNITY

Over the last four years, Cirque du Soleil has identified organizations that use the circus arts as a means of social intervention. The following criteria were used to identify them:

- As part of its activities, the organization offers a circus arts training component, with the personal and social development of the participants as its primary goal.
- Cirque du Monde has been able to collect sufficient facts regarding the organization's social circus activities, either via its website or based on information provided by the organization itself.

As of August 18, 2015, 502 organizations meeting these criteria and located in 70 countries were identified. For an overview of the organizations, please consult the [Social Circus Map](#). Not only does this world map show the location of these social circus organizations, it also lists the many social circus research projects currently in progress.

As the first criterion above indicates, social circus organizations are recognized as such if they offer, as part of their activities, a circus component which has the personal and social development of the participants as its primary goal. This recognition does not however reflect the level of intensity – or quality – of the practice. Although the activities of 33% of the organizations are entirely dedicated to social circus, many of these organizations offer other activities as well. The profiles of social circus organizations vary considerably. Here are the most common profiles in the community, based on our observations:

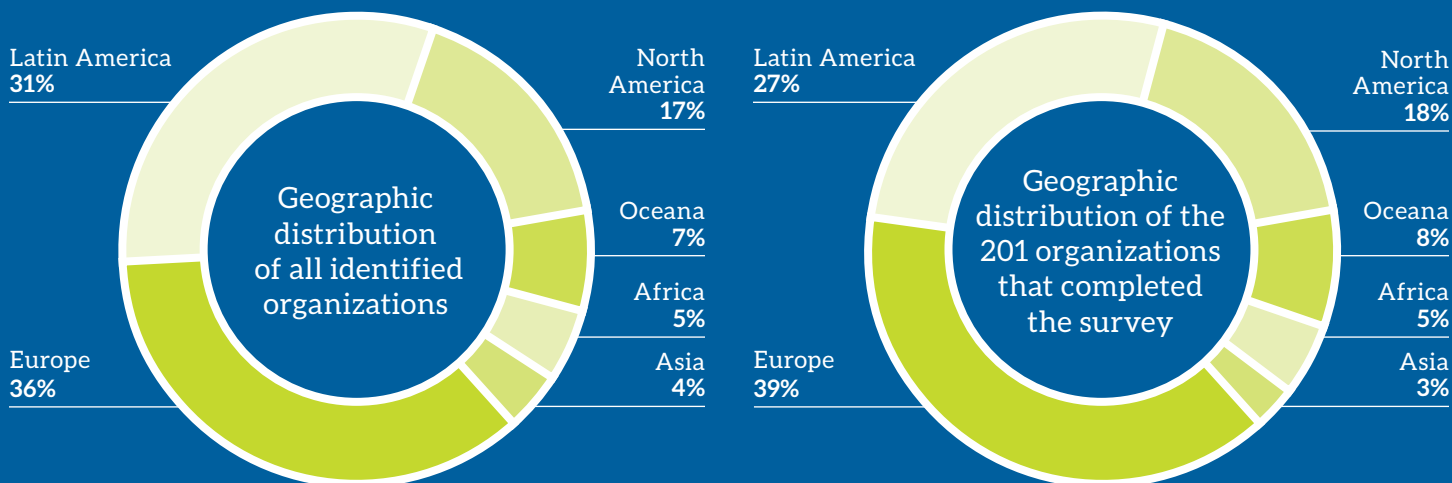
- Organizations entirely dedicated to social circus (33%);
- Youth circus organizations with a social circus component (22%);
- Social organizations with a social circus component (20%)
- Professional circus troupes with a social circus component (10%);
- Circus schools and educational institutions with a social circus component (15%).

Although diverse, these organizations all share a common denominator: they care deeply about the welfare of their community and invest time and energy to improve the lives of at-risk populations through the circus arts.

These organizations invest time and energy to improve the lives of at-risk populations through the circus arts.

## SURVEY

The Social Circus Community Survey was conducted between February and May 2015. Translated into six languages, the survey consisted of 25 questions on a variety of topics related to the practice of social circus. The organizations' participation rate was noteworthy: close to 45% completed the survey. It is worth pointing out the geographical representativeness of this significant sample. As shown in the figure below, the geographic distribution of all the identified organizations is substantially the same as that of the respondent organizations.



The following is a portrait of the overall results of the survey. Although the extent of the data collected would allow for comparative analysis between different geographic regions, we chose to focus at this time on the analysis of the data as a whole.

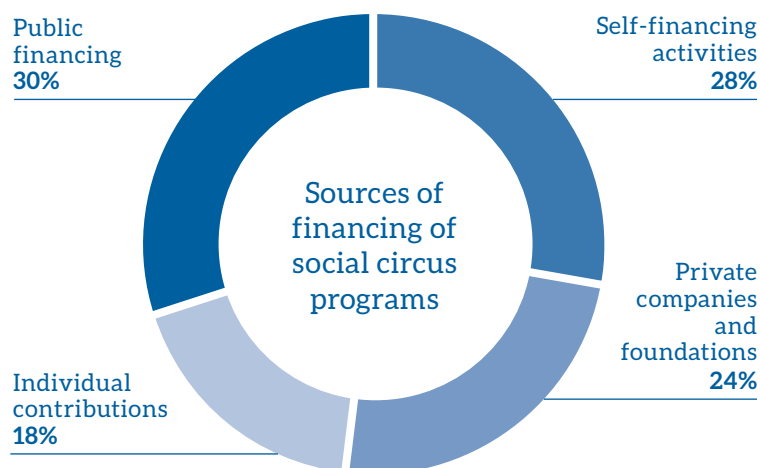
For a common understanding of the terms used herein, please refer to the [Social Circus Glossary of Cirque du Monde](#).

## INVESTMENTS

In general, the identified organizations allocate 19% of their overall budget to social circus, an average of US\$83,000 a year. However, the investments made by larger organizations, some reaching over US\$500,000 annually, alter this average significantly. Yet, the budget of two-thirds of social circus programs is below US\$83,000. To get a more accurate picture of these programs, the median is worth looking at; it is closer to US\$33,000 per year, per organization.

The US\$83,000 average however enables us to assess the overall global investment in social circus, for the 502 organizations identified. All in all, more than US\$41.5 million are invested in the practice each year.

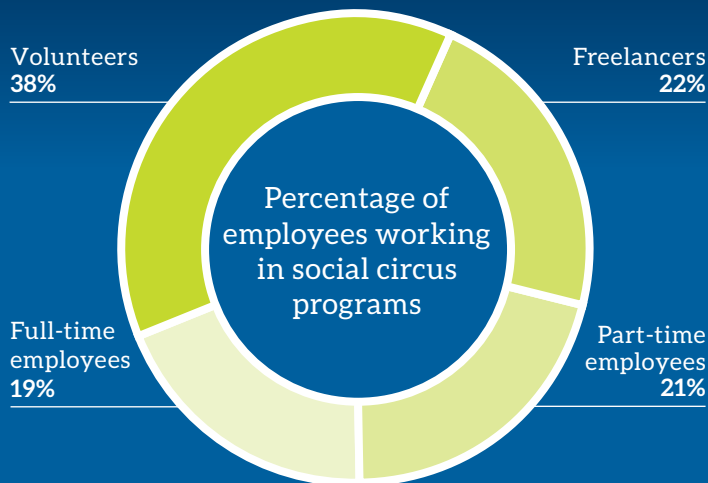
Although program financing is and will remain a significant challenge in this field, it is interesting to note that, globally, revenue sources come from a variety of sectors, in relatively equal proportions.



## HUMAN RESOURCES

Social circus programs employ on average a little more than 10 employees. In total, that represents 5,150 paid workers involved in social circus programs. Among these workers, one-third work full-time, one-third work part-time and the final third are freelancers.

In addition to these 5,150 paying jobs, social circus organizations benefit from the significant support of volunteers. In fact, over 3,175 individuals invest time and energy in social circus programs on a voluntary basis. Volunteers make up close to 40% of the total labour force of 8,325 individuals.

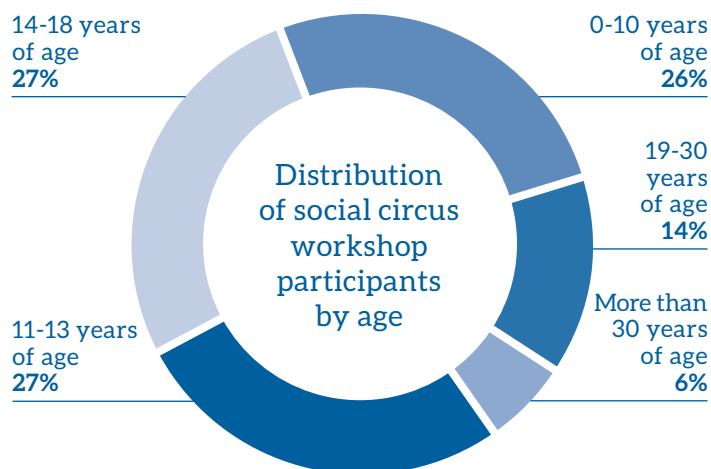


## PARTICIPANTS

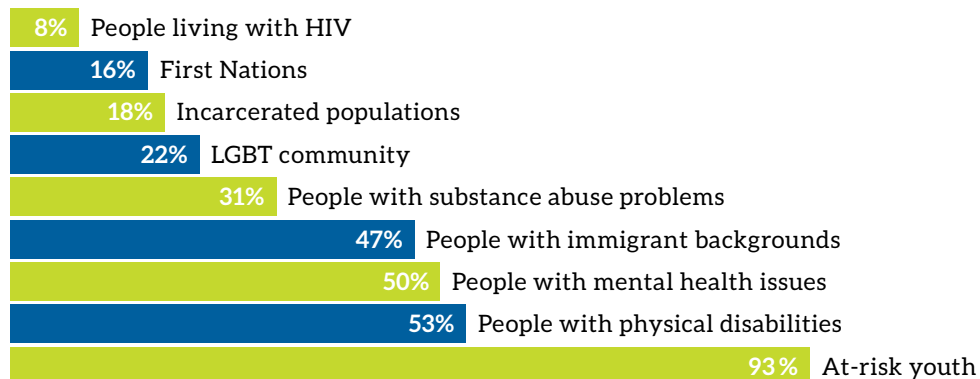
On average, there are 416 program participants who “are actively involved in at least one social circus workshop” annually. In total, for the entire community, there are 208,000 participants who benefit from these workshops each year. Taking into account the US\$41.5 million in total investment, the average cost/participant ratio in the community works out to US\$200 per participant, per year. Moreover, participants attend on average 97 hours of workshops annually. This exemplifies the power of this means of intervention.

As per the graph on the right, participants under the age of 18 represent 80% of all participants, with the 0-10, 11-13 and 14-18 subgroups’ portion equally divided. The 19-30 group makes up for 14% of participants. The over 30 group represents barely 6% of the participants. These results show that social circus is targeting, in large part, young people.

Participants emanate from a variety of groups. The graph below shows the percentage of organizations that support the following nine target groups through social circus workshops:



### Percentage of organizations that support the following nine target groups through social circus workshops



These numbers reflect the diversity of the populations who benefit from the practice of social circus. The various challenges that arise from the integration of these different groups show the adaptability of social circus and organizations that practice it. By supporting different kinds of groups that are often marginalized, social circus organizations act as a powerful tools for social inclusion.

“ Social circus organizations act as a powerful tools for social inclusion. ”

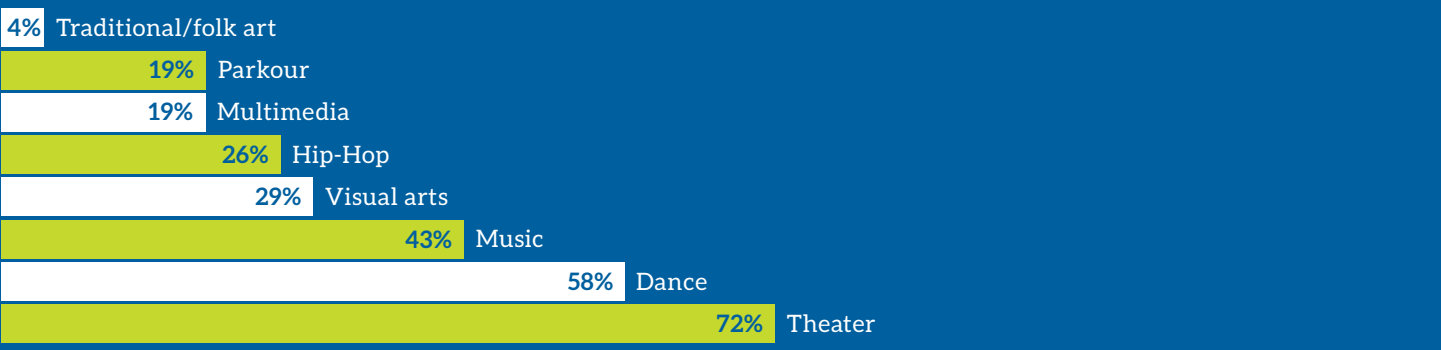
## WORKSHOPS

The survey shows that organizations offer, on average, over 650 hours of workshops per year. The workshops themselves accommodate on average 23 participants. As previously noted, investment in the practice of social circus totals US\$41.5 million. A workshop cost/hour ratio of US\$124 can therefore be established.

Furthermore, the survey shows there are 4.6 instructors/social workers per workshop, for a ratio of five participants for one practitioner. This surprising ratio is a testament to the rigorous social intervention framework that characterises the practice, as well as the strong participation level of community workers. In fact, 81% of social circus organizations seek the services of at least one community worker “who actively participates in each workshop”. Community workers represent 40% of the 4.6 practitioners present at each workshop. Not only are there many circus instructors and community workers who participate in one given workshop, they are increasingly qualified. In fact, coupled with their respective skills and qualifications, 40% of these practitioners have completed at least one training course in social circus over the last five years.

Social circus workshops are not limited to teaching the circus arts; several other artistic disciplines are also covered.

### Percentage of organizations that teach the following artistic disciplines as part of their social circus workshops



In tune with the interests of the participants, social circus workshops adapt their content accordingly. They promote the circus arts in general and integrate several other artistic disciplines, especially in their contemporary form.

# COLLABORATION

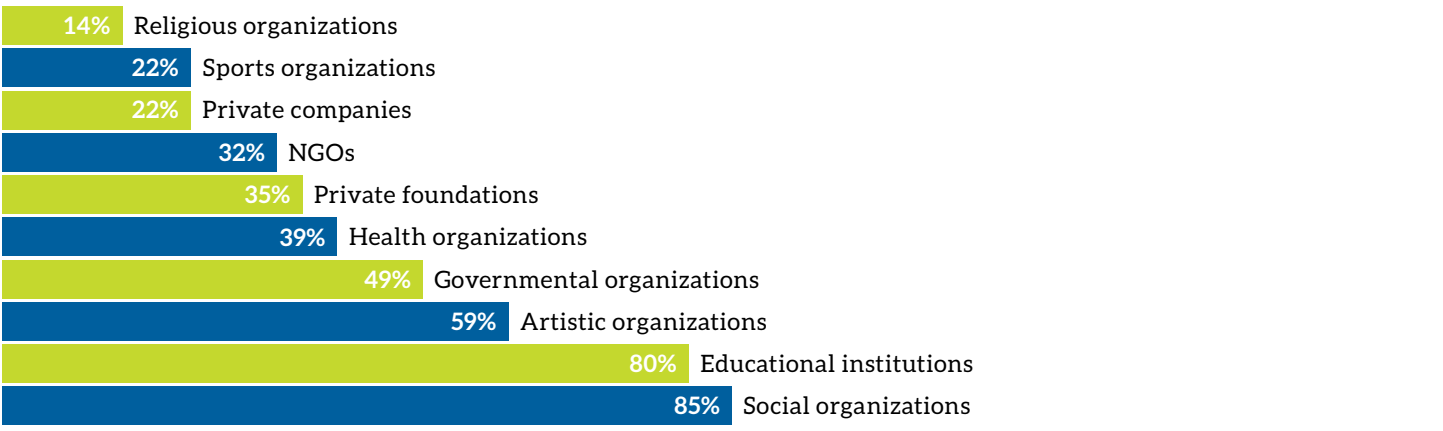
On average, 62% of organizations worked in collaboration with other social circus organizations in the last 12 months. This number reflects a trend that has been observed over the last few years: the intensification of networking within the community. Not only are there more local and international meetings being held on the subject, several social circus organization networks have recently emerged in Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Social circus organizations do not only work in collaboration with their peers. They work together with organizations from other sectors as well, including social organizations, educational institutions and artistic organizations, which form the largest part: respectively 85%, 80% and 59% of organizations collaborate with these sectors. 96% work jointly with at least one of these non-peer organizations.

It is hardly surprising that the social circus community works jointly with social or artistic organizations, but it is interesting to note that it maintains close ties with the educational sector. In fact, the survey shows that over 50% of the organizations intend to collaborate with the research community in order to have their program evaluated within the next year.

Several social circus organization networks have recently emerged.

Percentage of organizations that, as part of their social circus program, work in collaboration with the following groups



Governmental organizations (49%), private foundations (35%) and private companies (22%) that, as we have seen, represent major money lenders for social circus programs, are also, not surprisingly, sectors with which organizations collaborate. Collaboration with the health sector is also significant: 39% of social circus organizations work together with players from this sector.

# CHALLENGES

In the survey, social circus organizations were asked to identify the main challenges to which their programs are confronted, using a list of 11 elements. Not surprisingly, activity financing was identified as the biggest challenge. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 10 – where 1 is a minor challenge and 10 is a major challenge –, organizations gave this challenge an average rating of 8.

Financing aside, the ratings of the 10 other elements are, startling enough, relatively similar. Between the Managers Succession Plan, achieving a rating of 5.7 and Networking, with a rating of 4.2, the difference is not particularly significant on a 10-point scale. None of these challenges are considered negligible by the organizations; they are all considered somewhat important.



## Challenges to which the organizations' programs are confronted, on a scale of 1 to 10

4.2	Networking
4.2	Recruitment of participants
4.4	Adequate equipment
4.5	Stable location
4.5	Retention of participants
4.6	Access to research data
4.9	Recognition
5.6	Training of practitioners
5.7	Recruitment and retention of practitioners
5.7	Managers succession plan
8.0	Financing of activities

Beyond that, certain trends are emerging. Apart from the activities' financial aspects, three challenges stand out from the rest: Managers Succession Plan, Recruitment and Retention of Practitioners and Training of Practitioners. There seems to be major labour challenges related to the financing of activities. It may be difficult to ensure long-term continuity of the programs, and provide practitioners with competitive compensation or job security when organizations are dealing with financial insecurity. In that respect, it is important to remember that close to a third of the program employees are freelancers and that volunteers make up 38% of the labour force. Moreover, only 40% of practitioners have completed any social circus training in the last 5 years.

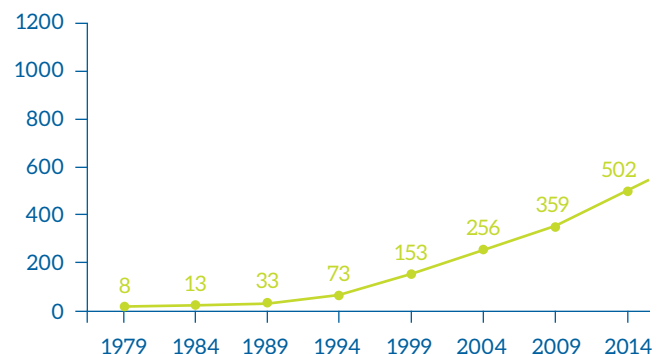
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## GROWTH OF THE PRACTICE

In the survey, respondents were also asked to indicate the year in which their organization held its first social circus workshop.

This data also shows that social circus organizations, first introduced in the second half of the 70s, were already present in large numbers in the 90s. There were over 70 social circus organizations in 1994, compared to 33 in 1989. In 2004, half of the existing 502 social circus organizations were already active. The consistent growth in the number of social circus organizations since the mid-70s is evidence of the vitality of the practice.

Growth in the number of social circus organizations 1975-2015



## CONCLUSION

The survey's results reveal that the social circus community is growing. From a handful of organizations dedicated to this practice in the 80s, it grew to over 500 organizations that practise this means of intervention today, all with a spirit of inclusion. Inclusion relative to the teaching of the artistic disciplines, as well as inclusion relative to the diversity of the groups who participate in the programs.

The survey also revealed the level of investment dedicated to social circus – US\$40 million annually. With this money, over 200,000 participants, mainly at-risk youth, can benefit from a rigorous means of intervention. The organizations' responses attest to this disciplined process: each young person benefits from close to 100 hours of workshops annually and many practitioners, 40% of whom completed social circus training, are present during the workshops.

The survey also shows that social circus is a jobcreating practice. In fact, over 5,000 people have found paid employment within the social circus program community. It also shines a light on the collaborative nature of the practice. Organizations not only work in collaboration with peers, but also with other sectors. Organizations surveyed are mindful of the quality of their practice, it is no wonder that more than half of them consider having their programs evaluated in the short term.

Starting as a modest practice in the early 80s, social circus has today blossomed into a dynamic movement whose growth has reached the four corners of the globe. This growth is a testament to the power of the circus arts. The power to move and inspire millions of spectators, year after year, and the power to contribute to a better world.

The survey  
“ reveals that  
the social circus  
community  
is growing.

Photo Credits Francis Lacharité

