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CSO Compass Moldova
Unfolding Civil Society Organizations Landscape in Moldova
through CSO Mapping, Study, and Platform

CSO Study 2024

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Over the past seven years, cases of attacks and threats against representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) have been recorded and documented, and the number of such cases has not decreased; this research has only confirmed their existence. Unfortunately, legislation does not provide real mechanisms to halt these threats against CSOs. Therefore, it is necessary to consider practices implemented in European Union countries aimed at eradicating such incidents and to develop and implement similar mechanisms in Moldova.	48
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List of abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CAWI	Computer-Assisted Web Interview
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview
FGD	Focus group discussion
LAG	Local action group
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LPA	Local public authorities
PSA	Public Services Agency
STS	State Tax Service
MER	Ministry of Education and Research

Acknowledgments

The CONTACT Center unequivocally extends its gratitude to People in Need for enabling the execution of this important study. We also acknowledge IData—Date Inteligente Company's active role in collecting the data for this sociological study. Their contribution was vital in assessing the capacities of CSOs and providing essential evidence and information on capacity needs and gaps within local CSOs.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the teams involved in this project and the invaluable contributions of representatives from non-governmental organizations who participated in surveys and focus group discussions. Their active input and feedback were instrumental in achieving pertinent results and gaining a profound understanding of CSO issues.

Through in-depth surveys and thematic analyses, we gathered a thorough understanding of the views and opinions of these important figures in Moldovan society. The results we obtained will be used as benchmarks for creating well-informed strategies and initiatives. This will help strengthen cooperation and enhance the positive influence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on Moldovan society and its communities.

INTRODUCTION

Context and Importance

The CONTACT Center developed this study in response to the People in Need Moldova Project: “CSO Compass Moldova – Unfolding Civil Society Organizations Landscape in Moldova through CSO Mapping, Study, and Platform: Component 2 – CSO Study”.

There are currently several significant studies that keep the pulse on the situation of civil society in Moldova and provide pertinent information for all stakeholders. These studies are the CSO Meter, CSO Sustainability Index, Eastern Partnership Index, and Public Opinion Barometer. Each of these studies collects specific information on civil society on a yearly or every two-year basis, allowing us to monitor missing or less studied thematic areas to include them in the CSO Compass Study. Two of the mentioned studies are dedicated to monitoring the environment of civil society organizations and measuring their viability (CSO Meter and CSO Sustainability Index), and the other two (Eastern Partnership Index and Public Opinion Barometer) tangentially address essential aspects regarding the degree of development of the CSO in terms of general freedoms and public trust.

There are also one-time studies dedicated to specific areas of civil society but they do not provide the repetitive analysis essential for tracking changes over time.

The resilience of civil society in adapting to unforeseen socio-political, economic, and natural disasters is an area that has received little investigation over extended periods. Currently, the resiliency of civil society is being examined in terms of its access to funding, financial viability, advocacy, legal environment, and central guarantees such as freedom of assembly, association, expression, and state support. Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the energy crisis have significantly impacted Moldova's civil society. As a result, CSOs had to quickly adapt and learn new skills to keep up with the needs of the people, beneficiaries, and state development and meet the requirements of the donors. The proposed analysis of CSO resilience includes sub-thematic areas of study on civil society's response to current challenges, involvement in solving emerging problems, and capacity needs.

We studied regional differences to understand better the situation and needs of civil society organizations (CSOs) operating at different levels in the context of decentralization reforms. Additionally, we investigated gender aspects to determine how sensitive CSOs are to gender issues and how they impact their structure and functioning.

As a result, the CSO Compass Study explores thematic areas previously studied but from a distinct perspective. Additionally, we created new research opportunities for civil society in Moldova.

Study Objectives

The study's primary goal is to evaluate local CSOs' abilities and gather more evidence on their capacity needs and shortcomings. With a focus on the localization agenda and the importance of empowering national actors, the study will pay particular attention to strengthening the resilience of local CSOs. It includes helping them adapt to working in fluctuating and unstable environments, such as during crises or natural and man-made disasters. Furthermore, the study aims to assist in developing future project proposals, improve existing programs, and provide evidence-based communication with donors and partners.

Target group: Non-profit Moldovan civil society organizations (public associations, foundations, private institutions and Local Action Groups), excluding political parties or CSOs affiliated with political parties and politicians, trade unions, etc., and similar groups.

The research will have the following scope and focus:

- CSO programmatic profile and territorial coverage

- CSO's current financial situation, diversification of funding, and future financial perspective, including cross-border projects and EU funding instruments
- CSOs organizational capacities, needs, gaps and barriers preventing development
- CSO resiliency and capacity to adapt to the unstable regional context (Russia's aggression over Ukraine, refugee influx and migration, economic crises, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda, and any other future potential threats)
- CSO cooperation with donors, international NGOs, and UN agencies
- CSO collaboration and networking with other local CSOs, grassroots organizations, and local communities, including Local Action Groups
- CSO collaboration with local public institutions, participation in public matters
- Gender analysis of the CSO landscape in Moldova.

Key Research Questions

- What is the financial perspective of CSOs in Moldova (average size of funding, funding sources, and the level of diversification)? To what extent has the financial situation of CSOs changed with the more significant presence of INGOs, UN agencies, and donors in Moldova with the landmark of February 24, 2022, etc.?
- What is the programmatic profile and portfolio of CSOs in Moldova (patterns related to profile and expertise, type of implemented activities, programmatic focus, including target groups, localization, and coverage, etc.?)
- What capacities, gaps, and areas require support and strengthening of local CSOs in Moldova? With a focus on local CSOs' resilience and ability to adapt to work in unstable contexts (e.g., crises, natural and man-made disasters).
- How many CSOs in Moldova responded to the February 24, 2022, crisis? In what form and how many were funded for that? Does it improve or worsen their situation, organizational capacities, resilience, and ability to adapt to changing and unstable contexts? How and why? How did they cooperate with the INGO community and UN agencies on that? What are the good practices, downsides, and challenges?
- To what extent do local CSOs cooperate with local public authorities, engage in public matters, and participate in them? What are the main aspects and domains of cooperation? What are the good practices, downsides, and challenges?
- What is the role of women in civil society organizations in Moldova? Are there any differences in women's and men's roles in CSOs? Are there any existing gender gaps and inequalities? What are the dynamics and patterns of women's leadership and empowerment in CSOs?

METHODOLOGY

To gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the CSO situation in Moldova, various quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used:

- desk review
- survey

- focus group discussions,

Using multiple methods also allows for triangulation, which enhances the credibility and validity of the search results since these can be cross-checked. If similar themes and conclusions appear in different methods and sources, confidence in the validity of the findings increases.

DESK REVIEW

Desk review includes the analysis of relevant reports and documents developed by international organizations, national organizations and various government institutions that can provide the necessary information to analyze the data obtained from the survey and answer the main questions of this study

List of the main documents and reports used for the desk review:

- CSO Sustainability index
- CSO Meter
- ASP database
- Reports on the financial situation of the non-commercial organization (National Bureau of Statistics database)
- Information about CSOs that have submitted the mandatory income tax returns in 2023 – standardized form ONG17 (State Tax Service database)
- Reports of State Chancellery
- Reports of the national CSOs (CRJM, CONTACT)
- Previous reports of the CSO development in Moldova elaborated by UNDP (2006), IDIS Viitorul (2015), EU (2017)

SURVEY

The CONTACT Center's methodology involved conducting a survey with Date Inteligente LLC to collect and manage the data.

Two methods were used to collect quantitative data:

a) CAWI method (Computer-Assisted Web Interview)

The questionnaire was distributed to CSOs for completion using online tools. 97 organizations participated in the online questionnaire. After receiving the completed online questionnaires, the operators checked for accuracy and validity. Additionally, respondents with verified questionnaires were contacted via telephone to confirm participation.

b) CATI method (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview)

The telephone interviews were conducted by 18 operators from the iData company using digital tablet devices and the SurveyToGo mobile survey application.

The use of two methods compensated for the shortcomings of each method, such as the length of telephone interviews or the lack of accuracy of online surveys. and allowed more CSOs to participate in the survey.

The Population and Sampling

The target group of the study is non-profit Moldovan CSOs, (public association, foundations, private institutions and Local action groups) whose activities are regulated by the Law on Non-profit Organizations of 2020 and the Law on Local Action Groups.

The sample design was obtained based on aggregated administrative data from various sources:

- Reports on the financial situation of the non-commercial organization (National Bureau of Statistics database)
- Information about CSOs that have submitted the mandatory income tax returns in 2022 – standardized form ONG17 (State Tax Service database)
- List of CSOs registered as beneficiaries of the designation percentage 2% mechanism (Public Service Agency database)
- CONTACT Center database

- NGO.md portal
- PIN CSO database
- UN Women Moldova (see: <https://moldova.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/07/database-of-civil-society-organizations-involved-in-the-refugee-response-in-moldova>).

Sampling Method: The sampling method employed was the stratified random method, carefully dividing the total population of active CSOs into representative layers based on the five regions of the Republic of Moldova. Each layer and the overall population maintained the same proportional structure. Subsequently, data collection was conducted following the structure of the obtained sample.

Sample size: According to preliminary data, 2764 CSOs had submitted their financial statements for 2022 to the Bureau of Statistics and had not registered as beneficiaries of the 2% designation mechanism. The sample was drawn from this population with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error while also accounting for underrepresented geographic units. The finalized sample consisted of 350 CSOs structured according to the specified regions.

Region	CSO Number	%
North	54	15.3
Center	55	15.8
Chisinau	205	58.6
Gagauzia	12	3.3
South	25	7.0
Total	350	100

Questionnaire Structure: the questionnaire (Annex 1) consists of eight blocks of close-ended and open-ended questions, focusing on different aspects of CSO activity to offer a broad and representative picture of the Moldovan civil society organizations' landscape and capacities.

Pre-testing the questionnaire: After approving the questionnaires with People in Need, the CONTACT Center and iData pre-tested the questionnaire to identify and resolve any ambiguities or comprehension issues in the questions.

Data Collection: Data was collected between 20.05.2024 and 02.07.24 using the CAWI and CATI methods. After the testing the questionnaire, we adjusted the initial questionnaire to improve the response rate among CSO representatives and reduce the time it took to complete the questionnaires. We also added some additional questions. The average interview duration was 45 minutes, with 48 minutes for the CATI method and 43 minutes for the CAWI method. In period 10 – 15 September 2024 the four additional questionnaires was collected from CSOs from Gagauzia.

The Results Obtained: The following data structure was obtained following the collection process.

Region	Frequency	%
North	54	15.3%
Center	73	20.6%
Chisinau	187	52.8%
Gagauzia	11	3.1%
South	29	8.2%
Total	354	100.0%

Profile of participants

Years of experience in CSO

Years of experience in CSO	%
> 10 years	38,1
5- 10 years	26,8
3-5 years	18,4
1-3 years	14,7
<1 year	2,0
Total	100.0%

Occupation/function

Occupation / function	%
Administrator/director	60,8
Chairman	19,2
CSO member	12,4
Board member	6,5
Founder	1,1
Total	100.0%

Data Processing

Cleaning: The results obtained were checked according to several indicators, such as interview duration, inconsistency and logic of answers, incomplete or abandoned interviews, or missing data. Interviews that do not meet the quality standards are either recovered or replaced.

Missing Data Management: When missing data is detected in the questionnaire, iData operators contact respondents and ask them to provide additional information or confirm previous answers.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: Before consenting to participation, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the duration, and the use of the results.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The collected data was anonymized so that the participants' identities could not be associated with their responses, and no personal information was available.

Data Protection: All personal and sensitive data is stored and processed according to data protection legislation, ensuring it is secured against unauthorized access.

Limitations

- **Accessibility and Response Rate:** There were problems with accessing CSOs to conduct CATI, primarily due to the length of the interviews and sometimes operators interrupting the interview and continuing after some time. When serious deficiencies were identified in the online questionnaires, operators contacted CSOs to clarify some responses.
- **Territorial Profile Challenges:** Organizations registered in Gagauzia are considerably fewer, with low response rates.
- **Refusals:** Among the most critical reasons for refusals, the following stood out:

Lack of time: Many organizations indicated they needed more time to participate in the study, possibly due to current obligations and responsibilities.

Lack of interest: Some respondents mentioned the study's lack of interest or relevance in the context of their current activities or business strategy.

- **Non-existent or Unanswered Contact Numbers:** Some contact numbers were non-existent, posing significant difficulties for operators in establishing contact with respondents.
- **Subjectivity and Bias:** the qualitative methods such as focus group discussions could potentially introduce bias, as they rely on participants' subjective perspectives and recollections.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The Focus group discussions were organized in period June- July 2024. In total were organized five focus group discussions (FGD) corresponding to the five geographical areas. The aim is to ensure representation from local, regional, and national CSOs, In the north and Gagauzia the FGD were organized with regional CSOs, in Chisinau was organized FGD with national CSOs, in the south and the center with small local CSOs. Each focus group consisted of between 7 and 15 participants. selected from NGO.md database. The list of focus group discussion participants representing different CSOs is in the attachments.

To ensure the quality of the focus groups, CONTACT Centre developed a focus group guide consisting of a series of questions and prompts for the facilitators to serve as a road map for the discussions.

FGD Duration: 1.5 to 2 hours.

Special Conditions: Discussions with CSOs in four regions were held online in view of the difficulty in gathering the necessary number of CSO representatives for a short time to participate in the focus group discussion.

SUMMARY

According to the Public Service Agency, over 16260¹ different types of noncommercial organizations are registered in the agency's database. Among these, public associations, foundations, and private institutions make up more than 12000. The share of active CSOs is much smaller than the total number of CSOs registered in the PSA database. Based on data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics and the Tax Inspectorate, we can assume that only 1/6 of the total registered CSOs are currently active.

The most popular legal form CSOs choose for their activities is a public association. The CSOs opted for this form due to its ease of administration and minimal registration requirements. It is also important to note the significant share of associations created by international organizations, possibly due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the refugee crisis.

Research data indicates that over 70% of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova are in urban areas. This is mainly due to the concentration of CSOs in Chisinau

¹ <https://www.asp.gov.md/ro/date-deschise/date-statistica>

municipality and district centers, where there are more opportunities for activity and development. CSOs in rural areas are more prevalent in the Central region than other regions, primarily due to its proximity to the Chisinau municipality.

Regarding activities at the national, regional, and local levels, there is a significant concentration of CSOs in activities at the national level overall. CSOs registered in Chisinau highlight a more pronounced focus on activity at the national level, while other regions are more focused on activities at the local and regional levels.

Most CSOs focus on social services, education, healthy lifestyles, community development, and environmental protection. Social services are the most common focus due to the country's challenging social and economic situations, making it one of the poorest in Europe. It leads to a high demand for support among socially vulnerable groups, which the state doesn't fully cover. Education is also a popular field of activity for CSOs, especially in non-formal education. Another important area is community development, particularly for CSOs in rural areas, where it's a primary or even the main focus for CSOs. Research shows that CSOs address the needs of all potential beneficiaries, regardless of nationality, faith, special needs, or interests. CSOs are crucial in providing public services, education, and charitable activities. They also actively participate in public policy advocacy and public awareness campaigns.

Despite the extensive activity of various CSO coalitions, networks, alliances, and platforms, only 54.8% of CSOs indicated they are members of such structures. CSOs from the regions are more actively involved in these structures than CSOs from Chisinau.

The annually budgets of civil society organizations in Moldova varies widely, ranging from 0 lei to over 5 million lei, depending on various factors. Most "well-funded" CSOs with budgets exceeding 5 million are located in Chisinau, but there are also such CSOs in other regions. In comparison, 16.7% of the surveyed CSOs reported having no income in 2023. The survey revealed a diversification of resources for the nonprofit sector in Moldova, with all significant sources of income being well represented. However, grants from international development partners and donor organizations remain the primary source of income for CSOs. It's important to note that many CSOs also fundraise from membership fees, public budgets, or donations from individual and corporate donors. Also, the 2% mechanism is a source of financial resources for over 17% of CSOs. Income from economic activities and service provision are secondary funding sources for CSOs, particularly for regional organizations. Almost half of the CSOs surveyed stated that they lack skills and knowledge in this area.

Most organizations are acutely aware of the need to diversify funding sources and want to consolidate their employees' financial management and professional skills. The study revealed that all CSOs struggle for financial sustainability and face challenges when applying for grants. Most grants do not allow investment in CSO resources, and donors tend to allocate resources to specific areas. Additionally, the high requirements for applying for external grants pose a challenge, especially regarding internal regulations. State-driven funding mechanisms are inadequate, with insufficient programs hindering many CSOs from applying for funding. Citizens and companies in rural areas are hesitant to donate to social causes. Many don't trust civil society organizations. Involving businesses outside Chisinau in social projects is challenging. Running a fundraising campaign requires significant resources that most CSOs don't have.

Only 29.7% of CSOs have a fundraising strategy, but even its existence does not ensure high fundraising capacities. Only 15.3% of CSOs noted the organization's high capacity in fundraising, while almost 40.3% noted that their organizations have low capacity in this direction. It is worth mentioning that only 1/4 of CSOs indicated that someone on their staff is responsible for fundraising. CSOs believe diversifying resources, developing financial sustainability capacity, and creating and implementing a fundraising plan are crucial to strengthening their financial sustainability. On a positive note, financial management is not a weak point for many organizations. Almost 90% of CSOs maintain accounting records with the help of specialists and special programs, and they also submit their financial reports to relevant authorities.

The increasing donor requirements for CSOs have led to a significant enhancement in their capacity building, focusing on developing and implementing internal policies. More than three-quarters of CSOs have strategic plans, which is outstanding. Over 60% of CSOs have important internal policies, such as Annual Operating Plans, Annual Budgets, Procurement Policies, and Communication Strategies. However, more than half of CSOs lack essential internal policy documents related to Human Resource Management, Conflict of Interest, and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. Half of the CSOs prioritize gender equality policies, demonstrating high gender sensitivity in Moldova, while digitalization policies are only gaining importance, with slightly over one-third of CSOs having policies in this area.

Recruitment and retention of human resources present a significant challenge for CSOs in Moldova. Over 30% of CSOs indicated that they did not have paid staff at the time of the survey, and those that did often had to hire part-time rather than full-time staff for specific projects. Only 8.5% of CSOs stated they had 100% of the necessary human resources, while 28.8% mentioned that their existing human resources covered only 75-100% of their needs. Among the main problems related to human resources, CSOs also mentioned low salaries and lack of career development. Volunteering is not a strong point for CSOs in Moldova, with over 31% indicating that they do not use volunteers. In the remaining CSOs, the number of volunteers ranges from 1 to more than 50.

About one-third of CSOs still lack resources such as offices and equipment for their everyday operations. Most CSOs expressed a broad scope of needs across all proposed areas, with the most requested areas of CSO development being assistance in fundraising, information about valuable resources for the non-governmental sector (funding sources, training programs, etc.), and information about non-governmental organizations in other countries.

Social networks were the most used means of promoting CSOs' activities. Organizational web pages came in second, being used by ½ of CSOs for promotion. More than 60% of CSOs have established communication strategies. While annual reports are valuable tools for engaging with constituents and promoting a positive public image, only 17,7% of organizations publish activity reports on their websites.

The non-profit sector is predominantly staffed by women, with over 67% of employees in CSOs being women and women managing 55% of CSOs. It's worth noting, however, that there are more male CSO heads in Chisinau. Interviewed organizations confirmed that women are the primary beneficiaries of CSOs. Only few CSOs indicated that men represent most of their primary beneficiaries. In most cases, men comprise between 20% and 50% of participants in CSO activities.

Over 60% of the organizations have confirmed their participation in responding to the refugee crisis caused by Russia's aggression over Ukraine. Where possible, they have provided refugees with necessary assistance, including accommodation, food, psychological support, and integration. It's important to note that only 39.7% of CSOs that participated in refugee crisis response received funding, while 60.3% of CSOs carried out these activities from their own resources and on a voluntary basis. The most commonly mentioned best practices by CSOs in recent crisis response include mobilizing the community, members, and volunteers. The biggest challenge reported by CSOs is a lack of financial resources and capacities related to their organization's involvement in recent crises.

The research shows that, on the one hand, the refugee crisis brought to light several issues, including the struggle of some civil society organizations to manage the situation. In response, donors stepped in with capacity-building training. On the other hand, there were CSOs that stood out, affirming their resilience and proactive crisis management. They effectively utilized their expertise and resources, demonstrating a preparedness and proactive approach that surpassed the state's response. Many CSOs found themselves overburdened by the activities related to the refugee crisis, leading to staff burnout. The short-lived nature of the projects highlighted the need for long-term financial sustainability. However, this was not the only financial challenge. CSOs also faced issues with large sums of money needing to be spent in the short term, donor-developed strict rules, complex reporting, procurement policies, and tenders. The need for

specialized experts, such as legal and psychological professionals, added to their financial burden. As a result, many CSOs are in desperate need of state support as their resources dwindle. Other issues mentioned by CSOs are the residents' negative attitudes toward refugee support and raised concerns about tracking fraud related to refugee support.

CSOs generally cooperate well with the authorities, albeit to varying extents at different levels. Local authorities tend to have more common ground and cooperation with CSOs than the central government. Most CSOs affirm that the authorities respect their independence and do not interfere in their activities. Additionally, the authorities appreciate the work of CSOs and often cooperate with them in joint projects, where the authorities are usually direct beneficiaries. CSOs are frequently invited to provide input on various issues and offer services, and the authorities may provide financial support for CSO projects. However, CSOs mention the authorities' need for more resources and capacities as potential obstacles to establishing closer partnerships. CSOs commonly advocate for and participate in public policy through awareness-raising campaigns, public hearings, and direct participation in local and government-level meetings. Petitions and declarations are also frequently employed for this purpose.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

General Information about CSOs

General information about CSOs is an important starting point for any study of the sector. These include information such as the total number of registered CSOs, their areas of activity, geographical distribution, beneficiaries, etc. An analysis of general CSO data provides a clear understanding of the organizational landscape, in order to explore in more detail the specific issues and topics discussed in the subsequent chapters of the study.

Normative/legal environment

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova operate on the basis of a normative framework that regulates the creation, activity and relations of these organizations with the state and other entities. The main acts regulating CSO activities in Moldova include:

1. Law on Non-Commercial Organizations (Law No. 86 of 11 June 2020)²
This law is the main legal regulation establishing the legal framework for the establishment and functioning of three legal forms of non-commercial organizations: public associations, foundations and private institutions. The Law details the procedure for the establishment

² https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=122391&lang=ro

- of CSOs, governance, transparency and financial reporting requirements, as well as provisions related to the dissolution of non-commercial organizations.
2. Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova (Law No. 1107-XV of June 6, 2002)³
The Civil Code regulates the rights and obligations of legal persons, including non-commercial organizations. This document stipulates the general principles of functioning of CSOs, their legal capacity, as well as their relations with other entities.
 3. Tax Code of the Republic of Moldova (Law No. 1163-XIII of April 24, 1997)⁴
The Tax Code regulates the tax aspects of CSOs' activity, including the tax facilities from which non-commercial organizations can benefit and their tax reporting obligations.
 4. Law on Local Action Groups (Law No. 50 of April 09, 2021)⁵
In 2021, the large family of CSOs in Moldova has been extended by Local Action Groups (LAGs), which is a new form of non-profit organization in which the main founders, together with CSOs, are representatives of local authorities and business.
 5. Civil Society Development Program for 2024 - 2027⁶
The Program was approved by the Government in 2023 and provides for a comprehensive action plan aimed at the development of CSOs in three main areas: more active participation of CSOs in public policy and decision making, Enhancing financial sustainability of CSOs.

Until 2017, CSO registration functions in the Republic of Moldova were assigned to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova and local authorities. Thus, CSOs aiming to operate at the national level or in the Chisinau municipality were most often registered with the Ministry of Justice, while the vast majority of local and regional CSOs were registered with local authorities. This decentralization of the registration process has greatly simplified CSO registration for local organizations and initiatives, which has influenced the growth in the number of local CSOs. These findings are partly confirmed by previous research and, in particular, by a 2006 study on the development of the associative sector in Moldova⁷. At the same time, it significantly limited the possibility of control over CSO activities, which, according to the law, was to be exercised by the Ministry of Justice. In addition, no one could say exactly how many CSOs were registered in Moldova as there was no single register.

After the 2017 reform, as part of efforts to optimize and improve public services, CSO registration functions were transferred to the Public Services Agency (PSA). According to this decision, all CSO files from the Ministry of Justice and local authorities were to be transferred to the PSA to be included in a common database. According to various data provided by the PSA during working meetings and CSOs' requests to the CONTACT Center for Legal assistance, there are still cases where some CSOs' files have not been transferred from local authorities to the PSA due to their loss. However, there is no exact data on the number of such cases.

According to the CSO Meter 2023 report⁸, the CSO registration procedure after the transfer of this competence to the PHA is free of charge for all forms of CSOs except LAGs and does not require high requirements from those who wish to register a new organization. However, the registration period, which is up to 15 working days, is much longer than for commercial organizations, which are registered in one day. Even though CSOs can be registered at any ASP office, which are open in all district centers, most CSOs are still registered at the ASP office in Chisinau, primarily because the regional offices do not have qualified staff responsible for CSO registration, which makes those who want to register have to go to Chisinau. Also, the possibility of online registration is not yet developed (according to the same report, only 10 organizations were registered in this way in 2023), which could significantly speed up the registration process and simplify the registration opportunities for initiative groups in regions and villages.

³ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112573&lang=ro

⁴ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=79111&lang=ro

⁵ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=126245&lang=ru

⁶ <https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/subiect-18-nu-843-cs-2023.pdf>

⁷ file:///G:/Contul%20meu%20Drive/PROIECTE%202024/PIN%20study%202024/Studiu_DSC_2006.pdf

⁸ <https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2023->

12/CSO%20Meter%20Moldova%20Country%20Report%202023%20EN_1.pdf

Legal forms

The Law on Non-commercial Organizations regulates three forms of non-commercial organizations, such as voluntary association, foundation and private institution. These three forms are perceived by all stakeholders as CSOs and are considered in this study. LAGs are also perceived as CSOs by all stakeholders and their activities are regulated by a separate law. At the same time, it should be noted that the Civil Code defines non-commercial organizations as a much broader list of legal forms.

Currently, the unified database of non-commercial organizations of the PSA includes 16260⁹ CSOs, which includes absolutely all forms of non-commercial organizations according to the Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova and includes, in addition to the above-mentioned forms, which are classified as CSOs, the following forms: political parties, religious cults, public institutions (such as schools, gymnasiums and kindergartens), employers' associations and trade unions, condominiums, etc.

If we leave in the database only those organizations whose activity is regulated by the law on non-commercial organizations and the law on local action groups, the total number of CSOs would be 12324, of which in the form of associations 11606 (94.2%), foundations 508 (4.1%) and private institutions 210 (1.7%).

This clear majority of the legal form with is the public association is due to their simpler and more democratic organizational structure, the possibility for citizens to be members with equal rights and to achieve collective goals in associations, and lower funding and management requirements compared to foundations and private institutions. It should be noted that 79.5% of foundations and 84.8% of private institutions are registered in Chisinau.

Some researchers identify as a separate form of CSOs that are founded by foreign or international organizations or that are branches of such organizations. The new law on non-commercial organizations of 2020 does not provide a special form for such organizations, so they are most often registered as public associations and very rarely as foundations or private institutions.

The structure of the CSOs involved in the study is generally in line with the data provided by the SPA. According to the results of the survey, the most common legal form of CSOs participating in the survey is the public association-73.2%. Public associations founded by international organizations -10.7%, local action groups (LAGs)-5.9%, foundations-4% and private institutions - 1.7%. Another 4.5% indicated that they have a different form, which can be explained by the fact that after the new law on non-commercial organizations, not all CSOs have yet made the necessary changes in their statutes and there are still forms such as Union of legal persons, Philanthropic organization, etc.

Legal form	Total %
Local public association	73,2
Public association (founded by an international/foreign non-profit organization)	10,7
Local action group	5,9
Foundation	4,0
Private institution	1,7
Other form	4,5

Table _. Legal forms of CSOs participating in the survey. N=354, %

The relatively large proportion of CSOs created by foreign or international organizations that participated in the study is primarily due to the fact that these organizations are very active. At the same time, they are an integral part of civil society in the Republic of Moldova, and as the study data shows, such organizations are not necessarily large and are registered not only in Chişinău but also in the regions.

⁹ <https://www.asp.gov.md/ro/date-deschise/date-statistice>

However, the issue of legal forms of non-profit organizations remains unclear. After analyzing the databases of PSA, the Tax Inspectorate, and the National Bureau of Statistics, we concluded that many non-profit organizations registered in these databases as public associations are, in fact, not public associations, as their activities are not regulated by the law on non-profit organizations. This situation arises primarily due to the imperfect standards of the databases or flawed legislation. This significantly complicates the analysis of CSO activities and may impact decisions made regarding the development of the non-profit sector.

Active CSOs

There is an ongoing debate among stakeholders regarding how many CSOs from Moldova are considered active. In international practice, CSOs are deemed active if they meet at least certain criteria that demonstrate the following:

- The CSO actively participates in public life, for example through educational programs, actions, campaigns, or events. It also submits activity reports and publishes information about its activities.
- The CSO is financially active. The organization must have financial activity reflected in periodic financial reports.

Based on the first criterion, it is very difficult to assess the number of active CSOs because, in Moldova, there is no regulation requiring the submission of narrative reports for non-commercial organizations, except for those CSOs receiving public funds. However, even this obligation is not monitored and is often ignored by CSOs.

Therefore, an estimate of the number of active CSOs can only be made by applying the financial activism criterion, considering that the legislation of the Republic of Moldova mandates the submission of financial reports to authorities.

Thus, an indicator of active CSOs in Moldova can be derived from information provided by the State Tax Inspectorate regarding the number of CSOs that have submitted the NGO 17 reporting form ¹⁰.

Another indicator can also be the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics, where CSOs submit their annual financial statements¹¹.

At the same time, it should be noted that for failing to submit financial reports to the State Tax Service and the National Bureau of Statistics, CSOs are not sanctioned, which is why some organizations prefer not to submit these reports.

According to data from the State Tax Service, 5,091 civil society organizations submitted the ONG17 Declaration for 2023 related to income tax for non-commercial organizations. These organizations include 4,933 public associations, 150 foundations, and eight private institutions, of which, after careful screening, a maximum of 4,580 organizations can be identified as fitting the definition of CSOs.

At the National Bureau of Statistics, only 2,782 organizations¹² whose legal form corresponds to the definition of CSOs submitted their financial statements for 2023.

This difference in the number of CSOs that submitted their reports to the State Tax Service and the National Bureau of Statistics can probably only be explained by the fact that CSO representatives believe the Tax Service may impose sanctions, while the Statistics Bureau lacks such authority.

It is also important to mention that, of the total number of CSOs that submitted reports to the Statistics Bureau, 30% reported 0 lei in their financial statements. In other words, these organizations can be considered only conditionally active if we take into account their financial activity.

Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain data on the number of CSOs that also reported 0 lei to the State Tax Service. Moreover, if we consider the fact that the income data reported by CSOs to both the Tax Service and the Statistics Bureau are almost identical, we can conclude that the

¹⁰ Income tax statement for non-commercial organizations for the fiscal period, Standard Form approved by Order of the Minister of Finance no. 08 of January 15, 2017, at [Formularul-tip Anexa nr \(sfs.md\)](https://statistica.gov.md/ro/situatii-financiare-66.html)

¹¹ <https://statistica.gov.md/ro/situatii-financiare-66.html>

¹² Date a fost furnizate de BNS la solicitare Centrului CONTACT

number of CSOs reporting incomes greater than 1 leu to the Tax Service should roughly match the figures from the Statistics Bureau.

Considering the overall figures, we can conclude that there are currently about 4,580 CSOs in Moldova that are either active or conditionally active. However, if we consider only the Statistics Bureau's data, fewer than 2,000 CSOs can be considered financially active.

These data are partially confirmed by a study conducted by the EU in 2017 as part of the "Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility - Regional Actions" project¹³, which indicated that 4,671 CSOs were active in Moldova at that time. The discrepancy between the data from then and now may be primarily due to the methodology used by the study's authors, the details of which are not provided in the document.

Geographical Distribution

According to PSA data, more than half of the civil society organizations - specifically 59.4%—are registered in the municipality of Chişinău. Similar findings are presented in a 2017 EU study, which indicated that 60% of active CSOs are registered in Chişinău.

Additionally, according to PSA data, approximately the same number of CSOs are registered in the Central and Northern regions, with 14.4% and 14.7% respectively. In contrast, the aforementioned EU study reported these figures as 13.3% and 14.2% of the total number of active CSOs. The smallest number of CSOs is concentrated in the Southern region and the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit, at 6% and 4.7%, while the EU study reported these figures as 5.4% and 5.6%.

Considering the demographic indicators published by the National Bureau of Statistics, particularly the population with permanent residence in 2024, there is a clear disproportion in the number of CSOs in relation to the population, favoring the municipality of Chişinău. At the same time, it can be observed that the percentage ratio of CSOs to the population in Gagauzia is nearly equal.

Regions	% of CSOs (PSA September 2024)	Nr of OSC (PSA September 2024)	% of the population with usual residence (NBS 2024)	Number of the population with usual residence (NBS 2024) thousands of people	Number of the population, with usual residence on one CSO
mun. Chisinau	59,4%	7318	27,5%	665,5	91
Center Region	14,4 %	1776	28,8%	697,9	393
North Region	14,7 %	1817	28,1%	681,7	375
South Region	6%	739	10,8%	262,9	356
UTA Gagauzia	4,7%	582	4,8%	115,2	198
Total					

Table __ Concentration of CSOs in relation to the number of the population

According to the data presented in the table above, the average concentration of CSOs in the country is approximately 1 CSO per 198 people, while in Chisinau this indicator is 1 CSO per 91 people, and in regions such as North and Center this indicator is 1 CSO per 375 and 393 people, respectively.

If we consider the proportions of CSOs in the regions that participated in the study, they are, to a certain extent, comparable to the distribution of CSOs according to ASP data. More precisely, 354 CSOs from all regions of the Republic of Moldova, except for the left bank of the Dniester

¹³ <https://eapcivilsociety.eu/news/project-news/statistical-analysis-on-the-civil-society-sector-in-the-republic-of-moldova-infographics.html>

River, participated in the study. The distribution of CSOs by region is presented in the following table:

Regions	% OSC	Nr OSC
mun. Chisinau	52,8%	187
Center Region	20,6%	73
North Region	15,3%	54
South Region	8,2%	29
UTA Gagauzia	3,1%	11
		354

Table__Distribution of OSC – howler, CSO Compass 2024 Study

Another important indicator can be the distribution of CSOs not only by regions but also based on their location in rural or urban areas. According to ASP data, 21.2% of CSOs are concentrated in rural areas, including villages within the municipality of Chişinău. In contrast, 78.8% of CSOs are registered in urban areas, including the cities of Chişinău and Bălţi. The distribution of CSOs participating in the study based on their location in rural or urban areas was 27.3% in rural areas and 72.7% in urban areas.

This concentration of CSOs in urban areas, particularly in the capital Chişinău, is primarily due to the fact that cities have more financial and human resources, which simplifies the establishment and functioning of CSOs. Large donors, including international organizations and foundations, are more likely to set up their offices in cities, where it is easier to coordinate activities. Additionally, more people live in cities, leading to a greater number of social sectors targeted by CSOs, such as health, social assistance, education, culture, and human rights. Furthermore, urban areas are more likely to have universities and other educational institutions that serve as sources of personnel and volunteers for CSOs.

Geographic Coverage

The legislation of the Republic of Moldova does not limit the geographic coverage of CSO activities, regardless of whether the organization is registered in Chişinău or in a small village. Therefore, the official data provided by ASP does not allow for the determination of the geographic scope of a CSO's activities. We can assume that most CSOs registered in Chişinău spread their activities throughout the country; however, this statement cannot be confirmed by official data. To determine this parameter, we asked study participants, and the data obtained indicate that 41.5% of CSOs operate at the national level, while only 9.6% operate at the international or European level. Additionally, 34.5% of CSOs conduct their activities at the level of development regions, districts, and cities, while 14.4% work at the local level.

The data presented in the table below support the claim that the majority of CSOs registered in Chişinău—64.2%—operate at the national level. Moreover, the largest number of CSOs that operate internationally are also concentrated in Chişinău. At the same time, it can be observed that a significant number of CSOs from the Northern, Central, and Southern regions expand their activities nationally, with some extending their reach internationally. This is primarily due to the small size of the country, a common language, and the use of new information technologies in communication, which allow for smooth coordination of nationally significant and regional projects.

However, we observe a practical absence of CSOs from Gagauzia that implement projects at the national level. This is mainly due to a lack of proficiency in the Romanian language. This conclusion is also supported by the opinions of focus group participants from Gagauzia, who stated that their lack of language skills limits their ability to participate in national projects and consequently hinders the coordination of projects at the national level.

Level	Nationa l	Local, in the rural area	Raion/ District	Regiona l	Internationa l	Local, in the urban area	Europe n
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Region	mun. Chisinau	20,4	18,5	29,6	22,2	3,7	5,6	0,0
	Center Region	17,8	35,6	26,0	15,1	1,4	2,7	1,4
	North Region	64,2	1,1	0,5	6,4	13,4	12,3	2,1
	South Region	0,0	27,3	27,3	36,3	0,0	9,1	0,0
	UTA Gagauzia	10,3	34,6	31,0	20,7	3,4	0,0	0,0
Total		41,5	14,4	13,6	12,7	8,2	8,2	1,4

Tabel __. Geographic Coverage N=354, %

Duration of Activity

Since gaining independence, the number of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova has steadily increased. As mentioned above, according to PSA data, there are currently approximately 12,324 registered CSOs.

From the beginning of independence until 1999, only 1,348 CSOs were registered in Moldova, accounting for 10.9% of the total number of registered CSOs at present. Beginning in 2000, there has been a trend toward a more significant increase in the number of CSOs. Specifically, during the periods of 2000–2009 and 2010–2019, 4,433 and 4,529 CSOs were registered, respectively, representing 36% and 36.7% of the total. From 2020 to the present, 2,015 CSOs were registered, accounting for 16.3%. Over the last four years (2020–2023), there has been a trend of nearly proportional annual growth in the number of CSOs, averaging about 418 new organizations per year. In 2024, during the first nine months, 342 CSOs were registered, which practically confirms this trend. It is noteworthy that the number of new CSOs registered in Chişinău and the regions over the last four years is almost equal, with a slight advantage for CSOs in Chişinău compared to those in other regions.

The duration of activity for the CSOs participating in the survey closely aligns with the official figures presented in the PSA database.

Year of registration	PSA	Study 2024
untill 1999	10,9%	15,2
2000 - 2009	36,0%	29,7
2010 - 2019	36,7%	37,7
2020 - 2024	16,3%	17,4

Tabel __ Year of registration

The data presented in the study reveal that both long-established CSOs, often regarded as mature or experienced organizations, and those still in development or newly established, with limited experience, are active. Interestingly, the number of CSOs has increased almost proportionally in recent years, indicating that Moldovan citizens remain quite active in the social, economic, and political life of the country despite the various challenges and issues faced, such as the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021, economic decline, inflation, and the war in Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022.

Additionally, the ongoing support from donors and international organizations that fund and contribute to the development of the civic sector in Moldova is crucial. The country also benefits from a relatively free political space, allowing citizens and civil society organizations to express themselves. This is an important indicator of democratic processes, where individuals can freely create organizations and influence public policies.

However, amidst the crises faced recently, there has not been a sharp increase in the number of new CSOs, despite a clear “demand” and expectations for more organizations. This is likely due to the fact that, although there is funding from international donors for CSOs, it is insufficient to

meet the needs of a growing sector. The requirements set by donors have become increasingly stringent, and competition among CSOs remains high. Furthermore, alternatives to funding from donors and international organizations are not yet sustainable. This sentiment is echoed by representatives of small CSOs in the southern region, who confirmed during focus groups that donor requirements have become very strict.

Areas and types of Activity

CSOs in Moldova operate across a wide range of fields. Analyzing information from public sources, social media, and various reports at both local and international levels, it can be concluded that CSOs are virtually involved in every possible domain. It is challenging to find areas where specific CSOs are not represented. However, there are certainly sectors where CSOs are more active and engaged.

There are no official statistics or databases that allow for a precise identification of the activity areas of CSOs. Furthermore, most CSOs do not limit themselves to a single area of activity; instead, they cover two, three, or sometimes more fields as outlined in their statutes. There are also no specific legal restrictions regarding the areas of activity for CSOs, even if these are not explicitly mentioned in their statutes. The main requirement is that CSOs do not operate beyond the provisions of existing legislation.

It is also relevant to note that there are organizations with specific activity areas. Examples include associations for water and gas consumers, which have largely been created to improve and operate relevant infrastructure, often in rural areas, and may not strictly be CSOs. For instance, out of a total of 12,324 CSOs, approximately 200 are of this kind. Other organizations include parent-teacher associations, whose numbers range from 200 to 300. These associations are essentially school funds and have faced repeated criticism from both authorities and constituents for illegally charging fees from parents. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is attempting to regulate the activities of these associations, essentially presenting them as part of the education system without having any legal authority to do so.

Another significant area of non-profit activity is sports. An analysis of the ASP database reveals more than 500 such organizations. The exact number is difficult to estimate. Associations that promote sports, according to international standards, form an essential part of the activities of non-profit organizations. Such CSOs may include sports federations, associations, and clubs that promote healthy lifestyles and mass sports, as well as organizations focused on developing sports among specific population categories. However, the registry also includes many sports associations that only partially meet these characteristics and forms, such as professional football clubs and other sports clubs at both local and national levels.

The diversity of CSOs' areas of activity is confirmed by the study results, which indicate that the top three main fields of activity are social services, education, and community development. Human rights and psychological assistance also rank within the top five. It should be noted that since CSOs rarely focus on a single domain, they were given the opportunity to choose up to three areas of activity in the study.

Fields of activity	%
Social services and support	33,3
Education	31,1
Community development	21,8
Human rights	15,3
Psychological support and assistance	15,0
Sport and healthy lifestyle	13,6
Environmental protection	11,3
Humanitarian aid	10,2
Support for entrepreneurship and economic development	9,6
Art, culture and heritage conservation	9,3
Tourism and recreation	7,9
Health and medical care	7,6

Civil society development	7,6
Agriculture	7,1
Democracy and good governance	7,1
Advocacy and public policy	6,2
Research and innovation	3,7
Mass media and journalism	3,1
Aid and emergency response (emergency response)	2,8
Urban planning and architecture	1,7
European integration	1,7

Tabel __. Field of activity, N=354, %

When considering the main areas of activity for CSOs across regions, there are only minor differences between the municipality of Chişinău and other regions. In Chişinău, the leading domain is education, followed by social services in second place, and activities related to a healthy lifestyle in third.

In the Central and Northern regions, the main areas align with the national averages. However, in the Southern region and Găgăuzia, community development takes the lead, while social services and education rank second and third, respectively.

It is also noteworthy that certain critical areas, such as European integration and emergency assistance, are modestly represented. This can be attributed to the need for specific knowledge, skills, and resources in these domains.

These findings support the conclusion that CSOs cover nearly all fields of activity within the country, indicating the maturity and development of the associative sector.

Key Activities of Civil Society Organizations

The study revealed not only the areas of activity of CSOs but also the specific activities they implement or the direct services they provide to their beneficiaries. According to the collected data, the most essential activity of CSOs is the provision of public utility services, which includes social services, medical services, consulting, education, and vocational training.

Another significant activity is the promotion of the interests of their members. Additionally, dissemination of information, awareness-raising, research, advocacy, and monitoring of public policies were identified as activities by 40.1% of the CSOs. Training and consulting were cited as essential activities by 35% of the organizations.

This broad engagement in various activities highlights the vital role that CSOs play in addressing social needs and contributing to the development of their communities.

Types of activities	%
Provision of public utility services (e.g. social services, medical services, counselling, education, professional training)	44,6
Promoting/representing the common interest of the members	42,7
Information, awareness, research, advocacy and monitoring of public policies	40,1
Training and consultations	35,0
Charity activities	19,2
NGO capacity development	18,4
Other activities	17,5
Humanitarian aid	13,8
Provision of other services (financial services, rental, production activities, processing, marketing)	9,3
Financial assistance (granting grants, loans, etc.),	9,0
I don't answer	0,3

Tabel _ Types of activities N=354, %

These data again confirm the public utility nature of civil society organizations in Moldova, highlighting their focus on the needs of their constituents, particularly their members. The results suggest a strong commitment of CSOs to advocacy activities, indicating a high level of engagement in influencing public policies and promoting the interests of the communities they represent.

Moreover, training and consulting activities have become a common practice for many CSOs, emphasizing their importance in developing the skills and capacities of both member organizations and the communities served. This not only contributes to the organizations' ability to fulfill their missions but also strengthens social cohesion and supports democratic processes in the country.

CSO Beneficiaries

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Moldova collaborate with a variety of beneficiary groups, demonstrating a diversified commitment to the needs of the communities. Among CSOs, some focus all their activities on a single target group, while others offer their services and engage different beneficiaries in their activities. According to a study conducted in 2017 as part of an EU project, the most common beneficiary groups for CSOs are youth and children. According to data from the CSO Compass study conducted in 2024, the most frequently encountered beneficiary groups include youth, children, elderly people, women, individuals with disabilities, and vulnerable persons. On the other hand, groups such as national minorities, LGBT individuals, victims of violence, and victims of human trafficking are supported by a smaller number of CSOs, which may indicate a need for better mobilization and advocacy in these areas.

The study allowed CSOs to freely choose the beneficiary groups they interact with, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the diversity and adaptability of the civil sector in Moldova. This flexibility suggests that CSOs are responsive to the needs of the communities and capable of addressing contemporary challenges

Beneficiaries	Total %
Youth	64,7
The children	54,0
Elderly	40,7
The women	38,7
People with disabilities	32,8
Vulnerable people	29,7
The refugees	20,6
Public institutions/organizations	20,3
Others	16,1
CSOs	14,4
People affected by health problems	8,2
Minority groups (based on ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics)	6,8
Survivors of gender-based violence	5,4
LGBTQI+	3,4
Victims of human trafficking	2,8
Asylum seekers	2,5

Tabel__ CSO beneficiaries N=354, %

The choice of youth and children as the main beneficiaries for many CSOs is primarily determined by the flexibility, activities, and free time of these groups. Depending on the region, these data vary partially and do not coincide with the general data, which is due to the prevalence of one or another area of CSO activity, the specifics of the region, or the characteristics of the target group itself. For example, in Gagauzia, young people, women, and representatives of national minorities play a special role as beneficiaries, while in the South, apart from youth, priority is given to the

elderly and individuals in difficulty. LGBT beneficiaries can find organizations offering assistance primarily in Chişinău, but also in the north and south.

Despite these small regional differences and the priorities of CSOs, it can be confidently stated that virtually anyone, regardless of social status, age, religion, nationality, etc., can find a CSO in Moldova to turn to for support, and that CSOs represent the interests of practically all individuals living in the country.

Conclusions

The legislation of the Republic of Moldova provides a favorable basic environment for the functioning and development of CSOs, which is primarily reflected in the constant increase in the number of non-profit organizations. Citizens of the Republic of Moldova can freely associate to create new CSOs or can find support or get involved in the activities of already functioning CSOs. At the same time, it should be noted that CSOs are more concentrated in Chişinău and urban areas, primarily due to the concentration of financial, informational, and human resources in cities, which provides CSOs with more opportunities for development and operation. This creates an imbalance between urban and rural areas regarding access to the services provided by CSOs. At the same time, the trend of recent years shows a roughly equal number of new CSOs in regions and in Chişinău, and if this trend continues for a certain period, the balance of CSOs will shift towards regional organizations.

The analysis of areas and types of activities has shown that CSOs practically cover all spheres and interests of people living in the republic, regardless of social status, nationality, religion, etc. However, one-third of organizations focus primarily on social services and operate in the social sphere, which is due to the very weak development of social services in the country and the high demand for such services among the population.

Education is also an important area for one-third of organizations, which is likely why youth and children are the primary beneficiaries of CSOs, suggesting that CSOs have a significant contribution to the education, training, and development of the young generation in the country. The proportion between so-called solid and experienced organizations and organizations in the development phase and new organizations is quite proportional and suggests that there is a balance and diversity in the non-profit sector, and that there is no dominance of more experienced organizations over new ones. This, in turn, stimulates opportunities for the transfer of experience and knowledge from more developed organizations to less developed ones.

Despite all the rather positive conclusions mentioned above regarding the current state of the non-profit sector, it is necessary to recognize that the proportion of active CSOs is much smaller than the total number of registered CSOs in the PSA database. Based on data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics and the Tax Inspectorate, we can assume that only one-sixth of all registered CSOs are currently active. It is also necessary to emphasize the imperfect system of registration of CSOs in different databases, both in the ASP and in the National Bureau of Statistics and the Tax Inspectorate, which significantly hinders the analysis of the activities and functioning of CSOs in Moldova, potentially leading to incorrect conclusions and, consequently, ineffective decisions regarding the development of the associative sector.

Recommendations

The main recommendations relate to improving the legal framework, regulations, and the registration and reporting mechanism for CSOs, particularly the creation of a new and improved CSO database.

1. Introduce new norms for classifying CSOs to clearly distinguish between different non-profit organizations, specifically to enable analysis of the activities of non-profit organizations regulated by the Law on Non-Profit Organizations from 2020.
2. Encourage the development of CSOs, particularly in rural and regional areas, by simplifying the registration procedure for CSOs and, in particular, accelerating the introduction and development of online registration for CSOs.
3. Include in the database the possibility of determining the activity level of CSOs in cooperation with the Tax Inspectorate and the National Bureau of Statistics, with mandatory consultations with representatives of civil society.

CSO Partnerships

Partnerships play an essential role in the development and sustainability of civil society organizations (CSOs). Collaborating with other CSOs empowers organizations, helping them achieve a greater impact in their activities and implement projects on a larger scale. Effective partnerships allow CSOs to pool resources, experience, and expertise to achieve common goals, which ultimately enhances their impact on society. Partnerships are particularly important for CSOs in a context of limited resources and competition for funding and grants.

Since the late 1990s, various networks and platforms have been actively created and developed in the Republic of Moldova to bring together CSOs in different fields of activity. Some platforms were established for a short period to advocate for a specific topic or issue, while others were created to promote common goals and develop the capacity of organizations. It is difficult to find a CSO activity area that is not represented by one platform or another. Social CSOs are very active in this regard, advocating for the rights of women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities. Environmental CSOs are equally active, as well as those focused on human rights and promoting democracy. Some of these platforms have been operating informally for a long time, while others have transformed into formal structures or have been dissolved.

There are also structures that unite CSOs regardless of their area of activity. One of the oldest and most important structures uniting CSOs since 1997 is the National NGO Forum, which takes place every two years and elects the National NGO Council¹⁴, whose function is to promote and protect the non-profit sector in Moldova. Another important CSO platform in Moldova is the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum¹⁵. In Moldova, this platform brings together more than 200 CSOs from various fields of activity. 69.5% of the CSOs participating in the study support the idea of a national structure representing the interests of the sector; therefore, the operation of such platforms should be supported and developed.

However, there are still a sufficient number of CSOs that have not realized the benefits of being part of a consolidated community or that, for various reasons, are not aware of such opportunities. Thus, according to the survey, only 54.8% of CSOs confirmed that they are members of various civil society platforms. Interestingly, this percentage in Chişinău is only 48.1%, while in the regions, with the exception of Găgăuzia, it exceeds 63%. These indicators reflect a significant need for regional CSOs to be part of such platforms, as this increases their chances of development, resource acquisition, and significantly enhances the efficiency of their activities.

At the same time, CSOs in Chişinău appear less interested in such platforms due to their isolation and, most likely, a lack of clear motivation for such a need. However, most large and medium-sized CSOs are not only members of such platforms but also often lead these platforms, providing leadership and secretariat services.



Figure __. Please specify if your organization is part of an NGO network, coalition, or federation. N=354, %

Despite the significant competition for financial and human resources within the associative sector, quite good relationships of friendship and partnership have been established. The activities of CSO platforms contribute significantly to this. Thus, according to the survey, nearly 73% of CSOs evaluated the interaction among CSOs in Moldova as very good or good.

¹⁴ <https://www.consiliuong.md/>

¹⁵ <https://www.eap-csf.md/>

Furthermore, organizations need to be informed about the activities of other CSOs. Despite the fact that organizations publish a considerable amount of information about their activities on social media, many CSOs are unaware of this for various reasons. For example, various study visits organized by the CONTACT Center in the country as part of different projects present considerable interest for CSOs.

In addition, when asked about the needs of CSOs, 48.3% of respondents indicated that they would very much like information about the activities of other CSOs in the country. The proportion of regional CSOs, excluding Găgăuzia, that require this information ranges from 55% to 65%, while in Chişinău, it is only 40%. This suggests that regional CSOs have less access to information about the activities of other CSOs in the country. CSOs in Găgăuzia show less interest in the activities of other CSOs, most likely due to their lack of knowledge of the Romanian language, a problem widely discussed among CSOs in the region and confirmed during the focus group.

Option	Total %
Very bad	0,6
Bad	0,8
Satisfactory	11,9
Good	50,6
Very good	22,3
This is not the case	13,8

Table __How would you rate the relations of the organization you represent with other CSOs. N=354, %

Although there are good relationships within the sector and more than half of CSOs are part of one platform or another, 44.4% of CSOs believe that the sector is very or somewhat fragmented, while only 40.9% consider the sector to be united. The reasons for this phenomenon are likely the dissatisfaction of some CSOs with the functioning of certain platforms, the lack of solidarity among CSOs regarding important issues, the difficulty in establishing partnerships to attract resources, and the increased competition for funding.

At least a few individuals who participated in the discussions during the focus groups confirmed that it is often very difficult to make decisions within the platforms, especially when it comes to gathering signatures for a statement. Most platform members are often passive and show little interest in activities.

It is also interesting to note that CSOs in Găgăuzia are very categorical regarding this issue, as 10 out of 11 CSOs believe that the sector in Moldova is fragmented. This is likely motivated by the fact that CSOs in Găgăuzia are more isolated than in other regions.

Option	Total %
Very united	3,1
Pretty united	37,8
Quite divided	35,9
Very divided	8,5
I don't know	13,3
I don't answer	1,4

Tabel __. *Opinion of the NGO sector in Moldova? N=354, %*

This is why 87.8% of CSOs believe that they should be proactive and cooperate more among themselves. This idea is supported not only by the majority of respondents but also by most participants in the focus groups.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the past 25 years, the non-profit sector has shown its willingness to strengthen efforts to protect its interests and those of its constituents by associating CSOs in various platforms. However, half of the CSOs are not members of these platforms for various reasons. Additionally, a significant

number of CSOs believe that the third sector is fragmented, which weakens it in the eyes of other actors and constituents.

To stimulate CSO participation in various platforms, it is necessary, first and foremost, to create a unified database of all CSO platforms in Moldova. This can be done on the platform of NGOs. Donors and the state should pay more attention to interacting with the platforms and, if possible, support their functioning and development. Special mention can be made of structures that, in one way or another, are meant to represent the interests of the non-profit sector, such as the National Council of NGOs and the Eastern Partnership platform.

Platforms should also pay more attention to the participation of regional CSOs within them.

Financial sustainability of CSOs

Financial sustainability is a paramount concern for civil society, as the endurance of civil society teams and endeavors hinges on it. Numerous pivotal factors shape the financial viability of civil society, such as the overall national economy, the income levels of citizens and companies, the burgeoning philanthropic landscape, the fundraising prowess of Civil Society Organizations, economic opportunities for CSOs, government grants, and other facilities, and the prospect of engaging in public procurement.

Given its significant impact, several national and international studies have been conducted to delve into the financial sustainability of civil society in Moldova, underscoring the importance of this topic to all stakeholders. To further analyze the crucial subject of financial sustainability for civil society in Moldova, we delved into the **CSO Compass Moldova study**. In this research, we examined similar aspects supported by both quantitative and qualitative data to determine if there have been any changes in the financial landscape for civil society. The survey and focus group discussions conducted in the study confirm the findings of the previously mentioned studies.

CSO Revenues in 2023

According to data from the **State Tax Service**, 5091 civil society organizations submitted the ONG17¹⁶ Declaration for 2023 relating to income tax for non-commercial organizations. These organizations comprise 4933 public associations, 150 foundations, and eight private institutions. The total revenue these 5091 civil society organizations obtained was **5.36 billion lei** in 2023.

The **National Bureau of Statistics** data for the same year indicate that 2,784 organizations submitted their financial statements.¹⁷ Their reported revenue for 2023 is **5.1 billion lei**. The Public Association Moldovan Football Federation (203.19 million lei), Soros-Moldova Foundation (129.76 million lei), and the Private Institution United American-Jewish Distribution Committee from Moldova (115.55 million lei) obtained the most revenues in 2023.

Since the authorities present slightly different data, it is complicated to name precisely the CSO revenues for 2023. It is clear that civil society needs help in financial reporting to the state. On the other hand, the state must apply the leverage available to oblige all CSOs to fulfill their reporting obligations.

The **CSO Compass Moldova** survey shows that 16.7% of organizations had 0 lei in revenue in 2023, and the majority of 27.6% CSOs surveyed had revenues ranging from 1 to 200,000 lei, while only 8.2% had a total budget exceeding 5,000,001 lei.

¹⁶ Income tax statement for non-commercial organizations for the fiscal period, Standard Form approved by Order of the Minister of Finance no. 08 of January 15, 2017, at [Formularul-tip Anexa nr \(sfs.md\)](http://Formularul-tip_Anexa_nr_(sfs.md))

¹⁷ The financial statements of the non-commercial organization, Methodical indications regarding the particularities of accounting in non-commercial organizations, Standard Form approved by Order of the Ministry of Finance No. 188 of 30.12.2014, at [Situatii financiare organiz necomerciale.doc \(live.com\)](http://Situatii_financiare_organiz_necomerciale.doc_(live.com))

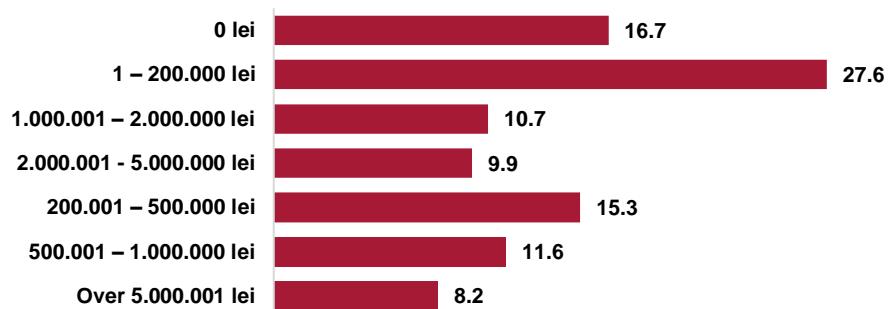


Figure 1. The budget or total revenues for the year 2023 was..., N=354, %

If we compare revenues to necessary budgets, the survey shows that only 11.9% of organizations could fully cover their activities with the revenues they obtained in 2023. Additionally, 29.3% had between 76% and 100% of their financial needs met, while 8.5% of organizations could not cover any of them. Most organizations that managed to cover all their planned activities in 2023 financially are from the municipality of Chisinau and the Center region. At the same time, 19 CSOs from Chisinau, six from the North, and two from the Center and the South failed to obtain funding for their activities (See Q12 – Did the financial resources in 2023 fully or only partially cover the implementation of the planned activities?)

Insufficient funding also creates human resources problems. A common challenge for CSOs in all regions is obtaining qualified human resources. For instance, **FG participants** from the South region note that salaries in the public sector have become more competitive, making it challenging to attract skilled staff to work for lower wages or to find qualified expertise for CSO activities. Gagauzian CSOs also mentioned the outflow of youth, which forms the backbone of many CSO activities.

Funding Sources and the Level of Diversification

All the studies conducted so far, whether international or local, reveal the same reality: Civil Society Organizations in Moldova heavily rely on foreign donors and their grants. For example, the 2018 European Union's Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility—Regional Actions **Statistical Analysis of the Civil Society Sector in the Republic of Moldova**¹⁸ made several significant findings regarding non-governmental organizations in Moldova. The study showed that, in 2017, the reported revenue by the source of Moldovan CSOs was as follows: 54% grants, 33% economic activities, and 13% membership fees.

The CSO Compass Moldova survey shows that, in 2023, the primary and the most important funding source for CSOs in Moldova continues to be foreign donor grants. 61.6% of CSOs surveyed indicated foreign donor grants as a source of financial resources. Moreover, 39% indicated that grants cover more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their budgets. Also, membership fees remain an important source of resources for 25.7% of CSOs, which for 6.5% of CSOs cover more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their budgets. Public finance has become an important source of funding for CSOs. 20.9% of CSOs indicated such resources in their organisations, and that for 5.1% these resources cover 76-100% of their budget. Donations from individuals and private companies should not be overlooked, as these resources were mentioned by 20.3 and 18.9% of CSOs respectively. However, these resources play an insignificant role in budget formation. Funds from 2% mechanism also play an insignificant role in shaping CSO budgets. Only 16.9% of CSOs indicated that they have received such funds, which are mostly insignificant, as only 0.8% of CSOs indicated that these funds form between 76 and 100% of their budget.

Economic activities and sale of services is a source of funds for 25.1% of CSOs and so far plays a minor role in shaping CSO budgets, as only 5.4% of CSOs indicated that resources derived from such activities cover more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their budgets.

¹⁸ Statistical Analysis on the Civil Society Sector in the Republic of Moldova, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility, 2018, at <https://eapcivilsociety.eu/news/project-news/statistical-analysis-on-the-civil-society-sector-in-the-republic-of-moldova-infographics.html>

Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that organisations are attracting as many different sources of funding as possible for their activities and are particularly focused on autochthonous sources such as donations, 2%, public funds.

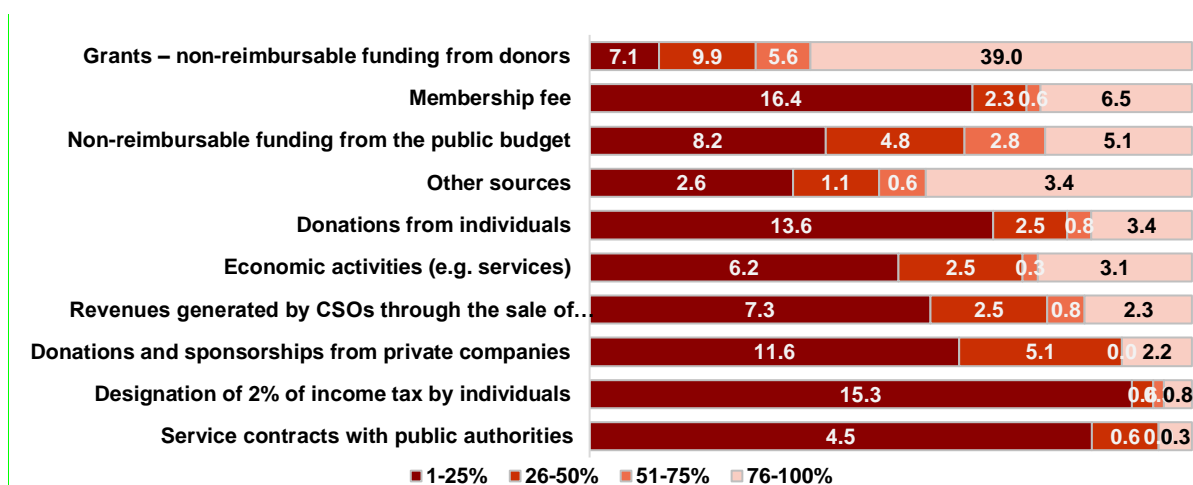


Figure __. For each source, indicate the proportion of the total 2023 budget. N=354, %

While the main CSO funding sources are similar in these two studies, the data has some differences. This is primarily because our study analyzed four percentage categories for each funding source, whereas the 2017 study only looked at the broad category.

An important indicator of low diversification of funding sources is the dependence of CSOs on a single source. Thus, according to the survey results, 37.3% of CSOs form their budgets from only one source of funding and the leader here is funds received from foreign donors. Of course, it can be assumed that these funds come from several donors, but the fact of 100% dependence is not a good indicator. Also quite interesting are the results showing that 15 CSOs are 100% dependent on economic activity and sale of services, and 19 CSOs are totally dependent on membership fees. Dependence on a single source of funding has a very serious impact on the financial sustainability of CSOs and carries great risks for the organization's operations.

Sources covering 100% of the budget	Nr of CSOs	%
foreign grants	66	18,6%
state funding	8	2,3%
donations from private companies	4	1,1%
donations from individuals	8	2,3%
sales of services and products	6	1,7%
membership fees	19	5,4%
2% mechanism	3	0,8%
economic activities	9	2,5%
service contracts with public authorities.	1	0,3%
other activities	8	2,3%
Total	132	37,3%

Tabel _ Sources covering 100% of the budget, N=354,%

The survey data was confirmed by the CSO Compass Moldova five focus group (FG) discussions with national organizations, CSOs from the North, Center, and South regions, and Gagauzia. Some FG participants consider that 70-80 percent of the non-profit sector's activity is ensured by external financing, while others feel that some CSOs survive only because of external grants. Some also believe CSOs need state financial support because they depend too much on international grants.

The focus groups shed light on several problems related to the financing of CSOs. For example, the observed trend is that grants offered are very small or large, with "the majority going to one or two CSOs in Chisinau." The qualitative data shows that the organizations in Chisinau are better at attracting external funding. For example, 34 organizations in Chisinau reported that their budget constitutes 100% external grants, compared to 10 CSOs in the Center region, nine in the South, eight in the North, and three in Gagauzia. Some CSOs consider it unfair that development partners use NGOs as service providers but take credit for the results. Additionally, some CSOs in the Center region feel that donors are biased in selecting grantees, particularly those working with national minorities. Regrettably, we could not corroborate or disprove any of the complaints in the quantitative study.

The CSOs also find it challenging to keep up with rapidly changing priorities and topics for grant calls. Some organizations believe that grant competitions are merely for show and that winners are already predetermined. Due to the complex application process and minimal amounts awarded, it is also challenging to work on grant applications with government ministries, particularly for grants from the Ministry of Education and Science. In the Focus group discussions, Gagauzian CSOs have expressed concerns that political influences have affected the allocation of grants, with projects bypassing Gagauzia. However, the survey indicates that at least eight organizations in Gagauzia received external funding in 2023, and at least three organizations received non-repayable funding from the government.

In the focus group discussions, national organizations emphasized that the current state funding mechanism¹⁹ is "inadequate, with insufficient programs hindering many CSOs from applying for funding." They believe involving civil society in setting funding priorities to meet their needs is crucial. Many national CSOs believe that authorities selectively provide necessary information for grant announcements regarding grants from the state budget. In contrast, local public authorities (LPAs) prefer to work with NGOs to implement infrastructure projects rather than focus on other civil society issues. Consequently, some NGOs have either ceased to exist or are redirecting their activities to different fields.

To better understand this issue of state funding, we analyzed the **State Chancellery report**²⁰ regarding the award of non-refundable grants offered by state authorities in 2023. This mechanism is based on Government Decision No. 656/2022 on the grant funding mechanism of projects of non-commercial organizations, allowing any central or local public administration authority to sign non-reimbursable financing contracts with one or more non-commercial organizations.

The report from the State Chancellery indicates that only six public institutions provided grants to non-commercial organizations: the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the National House of Medical Insurance, and the Investment Agency. State authorities offered 144 grant contracts worth over **64 million lei**. In comparison, the state provided over **212 million lei** grants in 2023 just for the sector of small and medium enterprises.²¹

The distribution of grants was as follows: 51% for cultural projects, 23% for health projects, 22% for youth projects, and 4% for social projects. Comparing the amounts offered by the state in previous years for civil society, there was an increase from 41 million lei in 2022 to 64 million in 2023. However, no level 1 or 2 public authority used this mechanism in 2023 to support civil society, which again concentrates the projects at the national level, as mentioned by the focus group participants. As a result, it is understandable that there is dissatisfaction with state

¹⁹ Government Decision No. 656 of 23-09-2022 for the approval of the Framework Regulation regarding the Non-reimbursable Financing Mechanism of Projects of Non-commercial Organizations, at [HG656/2022 \(legis.md\)](#)

²⁰ Generalized information on the granting of funding by the state non-refundable to non-commercial organizations during 2023, State Chancellery, at [info fn proiecte on 2023.pdf \(gov.md\)](#)

²¹ The number of beneficiaries and the financial support granted by the Public Institution Organization for the Development of Entrepreneurship in 2023, Statistical Report, Public Institution Organization for the Development of Entrepreneurship at <https://www.oda.md/files/rapoarte/2023/Informa%C8%9Bia%20statistic%C4%83%20privind%20Programele%20IP%20ODA,%20anul%202023.pdf>

authorities, especially from the local organizations responsible for implementing projects at the village, city, municipality, and district levels.

In addition, certain public institutions, such as the Investment Agency, provide grants to professional or interest associations that serve the interests of their members rather than the wider community. There are also organizations, such as the Positive Initiative, that secured five non-reimbursable funding contracts in 2023, four of which are from the Ministry of Health and one from the National Medical Insurance House. These public data may understandably raise suspicions regarding the impartiality of the awarding process among CSOs that have not received funding from these institutions.

As we can see from the above-mentioned survey data and state data, the dependence on external funding formed and dominated Moldovan civil society despite significant improvements in legislation and practice related to diversifying sources of revenue for CSOs. Examples of these improvements include the "2% law,"²² which allows taxpayers to designate 2% of their income tax to a non-commercial organization, the Law on Sponsorship and Philanthropy²³ that permits donations and sponsorships from the private sector, the Government Decision regarding the grant funding mechanism of projects of non-commercial organizations²⁴, and the legal possibility for the non-profit sector to engage in economic activity²⁵. Moreover, the studies link the extent of financial resource diversification to organizational development, financial management, accountability, and transparency capabilities and procedures in place.

For instance, the **Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index**²⁶ has been instrumental in evaluating the financial stability of Moldovan CSOs. This assessment has revealed a consistent and promising improvement, with the index rising from 5.2 in 2005 to 4.2 in 2022. It's worth noting that the CSO Sustainability Index employs a seven-point scale, where 1 signifies the highest sustainability, and 7 represents the lowest.

Since 2011, Moldova's rating has fallen into the Sustainability Evolving (3.1-5) category – civil society organizations are spearheading innovative strategies to achieve financial independence and sustainability within this category. According to the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index Methodology²⁷, while CSOs continue to rely heavily on foreign donors, they are actively exploring avenues to diversify their funding sources. "Individual CSOs experiment with raising revenues through providing services, winning contracts and grants from municipalities and ministries to provide services, or attempting to attract dues-paying members or domestic donors. However, a depressed local economy may hamper efforts to raise funds from local sources. Training programs address financial management issues, and CSOs have begun to understand the importance of transparency and accountability from a fundraising perspective, although they may be unable to implement transparency measures fully."

This dimension is assessed based on local funding sources, philanthropy, non-monetary support, the diversification of funding sources, effective financial systems for transparency and accountability, fundraising capabilities, and other sources of revenue like membership fees, government contracts, and revenue from services, products, or rent.

²² Government Decision No. 1286 of 11-30-2016 for the approval of the Regulation regarding the Percentage Designation Mechanism, at [HG1286/2016 \(legis.md\)](#)

²³ Law No. 1420 of 10-31-2002 on Philanthropy and Sponsorship, at [LP1420/2002 \(legis.md\)](#)

²⁴ Government Decision No. 656 of 23-09-2022 for the approval of the Framework Regulation regarding the Non-reimbursable Financing Mechanism of Projects of Non-commercial Organizations, at [HG656/2022 \(legis.md\)](#)

²⁵ Law No. 86 of 11-06-2020 regarding Non-commercial Organizations, Article 6, at [LP86/2020 \(legis.md\)](#)

²⁶ Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index, USAID and FHI360, at [CSO Sustainability Index Explorer \(csosi.org\)](#)

²⁷ CSO Sustainability Index Methodology, USAID, at [CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX METHODOLOGY \(usaid.gov\)](#)

A local study performed by Idis Viitorul – **Civil Society Organizations in Moldova: Evolution, Sustainability, and Participation in the Political Dialogue**²⁸ – shows that 43.8% of the interviewed organizations assessed civil society's financial sustainability as "poor," while only 7.7% rated it as "good," while 36.9% rated it as "non-existent." This study also shows the dependence of civil society organizations on foreign donors, with 70% of the answers for the first funding source.

The **CSO Compass Moldova survey** shows that 40.3% of civil society organizations expressed satisfaction with their ability to collect funds from external sources, while 39.3% reported reduced capacity. Only 15.3% of CSOs believe they have strong fundraising skills for obtaining grants from external funders (See Q16.1 – How do you rate your organization's fundraising capabilities from external sources?).

The respondents' opinions regarding the development of economic activities and the provision of services are somewhat less optimistic, with 48.8% of CSOs opting for the qualification of low capabilities. Only 9.9% consider they have high capabilities, and another 35.9% assess their capabilities as satisfactory (See Q16.2 – How do you rate your organization's capabilities in developing economic activities and providing services?).

In addition, only 105 CSOs, or 29.7%, have a fundraising strategy. Most organizations with a fundraising strategy are located in the central region of Moldova, and none of the CSOs from Gagauzia have such a policy (See Q20.2—Fundraising Strategy).

The **focus group discussions** organized as part of the CSO Compass Moldova revealed problems at the regulatory framework level. Although it is possible to mobilize resources from the business through philanthropy and sponsorship²⁹, the legal framework does not motivate companies to donate to the associative sector. By law, companies can deduct philanthropic donations and sponsorship expenses from their taxable income up to 5%. However, this doesn't strongly incentivize donations, especially for small companies, and the administrative requirements of obtaining the tax benefit are onerous.

Banking issues were highlighted, with banks requiring a long list of documents to open an account for a civil society organization since CSOs are groundless considered structures with an increased risk of financing terrorism and money laundering. This list includes the list of beneficiaries and organization members. Furthermore, the physical signing of the list by organization members poses a challenge, especially for associations whose members are mostly abroad. Furthermore, co-financing grant programs and transferring money after project implementation were indicated as practical issues hindering CSOs from accessing more funds.

Another obstacle is that, although civil society is legally allowed to carry out economic activities, CSOs are not eligible for **Organization for the Development of Entrepreneurship** programs such as grants and access to funding³⁰. The same goes for the **European Village Program**³¹, which provides financial aid of up to 10 million lei for local public authorities. One participant confessed that the local public authority contracted their CSO to prepare the project proposals for the European Village Program, and their proposal was successful. Still, the CSO cannot benefit from the project. Moreover, CSOs are not exempt from participation fees and performance guarantees for participating in public tenders and are treated like businesses.

²⁸ Civil Society Organizations in Moldova: Evolution, Sustainability, and Participation in the Political Dialogue, Idis Viitorul, 2014, at [4684299_md_mapping_md_idi.pdf \(viitorul.org\)](https://www.viitorul.org/4684299_md_mapping_md_idi.pdf)

²⁹ Law No. 1420 from 31-10-2002 on Philanthropy and Sponsorship, at [LP1420/2002 \(legis.md\)](https://legis.md/LP1420/2002)

³⁰ The number of beneficiaries and the financial support granted according to the Programs implemented by the Public Institution Organization for the Development of Entrepreneurship, First Quarter Report, Year 2024, at [Informația statistică privind Programele IP ODA Trim. I, anul 2024.pdf](https://www.oda.gov.md/ro/informatia-statistica-privind-programele-IP-ODA-Trim-I-anul-2024.pdf)

³¹ List of Priority Local Development Projects for Financing from the National Fund for Regional and Local Development for 2024-2025, at <https://satuleuropean.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Lista-proiectelor.pdf>

As desirable solutions, focus group participants mentioned that the state should support NGOs through free or preferential rental of premises and equipment and helping with other administrative needs because not all donors agree to cover these expenses. Civil society wants legislative changes for public utility status since it “does not bring many facilities to public associations.”

At the same time, FG participants noticed a positive dynamic of contributions through the **percentage designation mechanism**. The percentage designation mechanism is described in Government Decision No. 1286 from 30-11-2016³². The mechanism allows taxpayers with no outstanding debts to the national public budget from previous fiscal periods to allocate up to 2% of their annual income tax amount to non-commercial organizations, religious groups, and other eligible entities.

Still, some view the mechanism as ineffective because it is pointless if a young NGO does not have a large following. “Small CSOs are disadvantaged in the 2% mechanism compared to the Ministry of Internal Affairs NGO, to which all ministry employees, including the police force and firefighters, redirect 2%”, mentioned one participant.

The **CSO Meter** is another invaluable tool that evaluates the legal framework and implementation of policies that impact civil society in the Eastern Partnership region. Among the key areas it examines is access to funding. Moldova scored 5.3 in this area over the past two years (2022³³ and 2023³⁴), registering an increase of 0.1 compared to 2021. The scoring is based on a 7-point scale, where 1 signifies a highly unfavorable (authoritarian) environment for Civil Society Organizations, and 7 represents an extremely favorable (ideally democratic) environment for CSOs.

CSO Meter argues the score obtained by Moldova in the access to funding chapter through the following facts. “CSOs are free to request, receive, and use financial and material means, from within the country or abroad, including public funds, to achieve their statutory purposes. CSOs can use different methods to access various funding sources, from abroad and within the country, without barriers and under the same tax conditions. Still, international donors remain their main source of income. Other sources and fundraising methods used include membership fees, traditional local donations, support from business entities, crowdfunding, SMS or online donations, the percentage designation mechanism, support from the state, and economic activities, including social entrepreneurship. [...] The requirements for CSOs to receive, use, and report funding are subject to the rules of the donor institutions and banking regulations. CSOs’ financial operations are conducted mainly through banking operations, but there are some limitations determined by AML/CTF legislation concerning international transactions. Pursuant to this, CSOs must provide additional documentary justification to banks to transfer any refunds to donors abroad, which can lead to delays in transfers.”³⁵ As you can see, some of the issues identified during the **CSO Compass Moldova** FG discussions were confirmed by the CSO Meter.

CSO Financial and Managerial Capacity

Financial and managerial capabilities are critical for organizations to succeed in raising funds and developing new services. According to the **CSO Compass Moldova survey**, 88.1% of organizations systematically manage their accounting activities through an accountant or specialized firm, 84.2% have an annual financial report available to interested parties, 75.4% use specialized software for accounting records, and 49.4% conduct a financial audit at least once

³² Government Decision No. 1286 of 11-30-2016 for the approval of the Regulation regarding the Percentage Designation Mechanism, at [HG1286/2016 \(legis.md\)](#)

³³ CSO Meter – A Compass to Conducive Environment and Empowerment. Moldova 2022 Country Report, at [2022 Moldova CSO Meter Country Report English.pdf](#)

³⁴ CSO Meter – A Compass to Conducive Environment and Empowerment. Moldova 2023 Country Report, at [Moldova 2023 CSO Meter Country Report 2 EN.pdf](#)

³⁵ CSO Meter – A Compass to Conducive Environment and Empowerment. Regional Report 2023, at [CSO Meter 2023 Regional Report.pdf](#)

every two years. On the other hand, only 27.4% of organizations systematically carry out fundraising activities within the country, and only 26.0% have an employee responsible for fundraising.

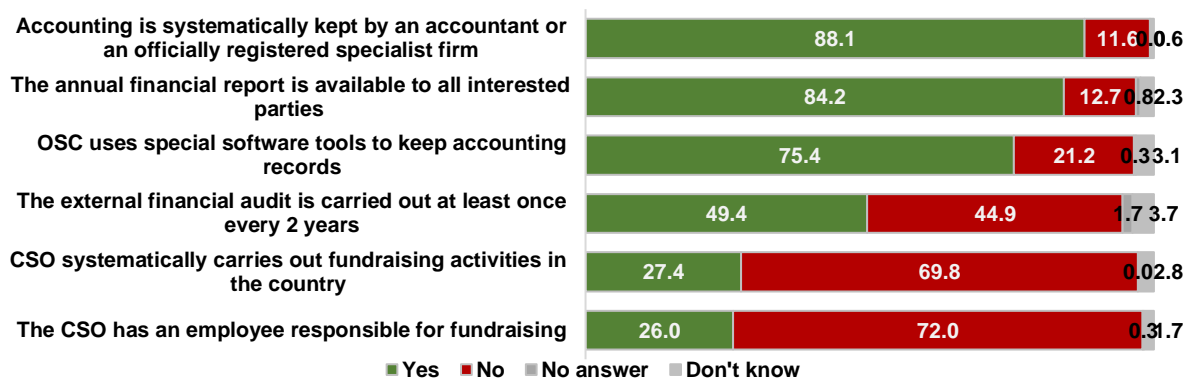


Figure __. Tick which of these statements is true for your organization. N=354, %

Among the organizations that have people on staff responsible for fundraising activities, most are concentrated in the municipality of Chisinau (60 CSOs); on the other hand, only three CSOs from Gagauzia have employees with such responsibilities. Accounting is systematically kept by an accountant or an officially registered specialist firm in 90.9% of CSOs in Chisinau, 89.7% of CSOs in the South, and 87% of organizations in the North. The external financial audit is carried out at least once every two years in 58.3% of the organizations in Chisinau and only in 27.3% in Gagauzia (See Q15 - Tick which of these statements is true for your organization).

Regarding the measures that could improve the civil society's financial situation from the sustainability perspective the 88.4% of organizations are acutely aware of the need to diversify funding sources, and 81.6% of CSOs understand the need to invest in the professional development of their employees. In comparison, 77.7% see the need to develop a financial sustainability plan, and 67.4% consider consolidating financial management a solution. At the same time, only 51.1% believe that optimizing expenses would bring results. Other solutions named by the responding organizations are aid from the state, the development of the entrepreneurial approach, more possibilities to apply for grants, financial resources to attract and retain qualified personnel, and others.

The Impact of the Refugee Crisis. Perception of Donor Organizations

Given Moldovan CSOs' active involvement in managing the refugee crisis alongside foreign authorities and organizations, we were interested in understanding the impact on their budgets.

According to the 2023 **Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova**³⁶, 89% of the 197 CSOs surveyed for the study assisted refugees from Ukraine in 2022. "The largest share of assistance provided by CSOs was in the Center region (43%), followed by the South (37%), North (35%) and Chişinău (35%) regions. [...] Over half of CSOs (61%) reported receiving funding from INGOs, and around one-third of organizations reported their sources (34%). 38 20% of CSOs received funding from UN agencies, while 26% reported other funding sources, such as local businesses and private donations. 1% of organizations reported receiving state funding through the Ministries of Education, Research, and Culture."

The **CSO Compass Moldova** survey depicts that, despite the outbreak of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine and the arrival of several international organizations in Moldova, the financial situation of half of the CSOs remained stable. For 37% of the organizations, especially those in the North and South, the situation improved, likely due to their proximity to

³⁶ Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova, Magenta Consulting for UN Women and UNHCR, 2023, p.14-20, at https://moldova.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/mapping_of_local_csos_in_refugee_response_in_moldova.pdf

land customs crossing points. In contrast, 9.3% of cases worsened. At large, for the majority of CSOs, the refugee crisis did not directly impact their activity. See Q17 for more information.

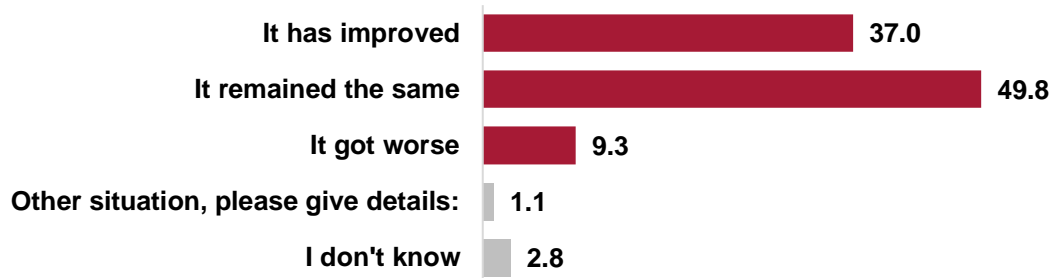


Figure __. To what extent has your organization's financial situation changed since 24th February 2022? N=354, %

The focus group discussions unveiled more details about the impact of the refugee crisis on Moldovan Civil Society Organizations. Generally, participants acknowledged that the refugee crisis has brought more funds to Moldova, leading to projects dedicated to supporting refugees, women's rights, children's rights, combating violence, and providing new equipment, goods, and other products. This has also strengthened the internal management of Civil Society Organizations. One participant even said their organization “became more visible” among its constituents due to its involvement in solving the refugee crisis. Another pointed out that it is “crucial that small NGOs are also given opportunities to access grants, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources.”

“CSOs have demonstrated resilience and proactively managed crises, leveraging their expertise and other resources. Their preparedness and proactive approach were evident in their ability to manage crises more effectively than the government”, said one participant.

However, negative situations arose, such as inflation and an increase in the price of services and goods that impacted all CSO activities and people in Moldova. At the same time, a participant noted that donors tend to allocate substantial resources to humanitarian efforts related to the refugee crisis and promoting women-owned businesses, making CSOs working in other fields ineligible for funding.

“The refugee crisis revealed several problems, such as NGOs lacking the capacity to manage it, and then donors came up with capacity-building training. Another problem was that CSO activities overburdened some organizations, and the staff burnt out. The projects were short-lived, and long-term financial sustainability needed to be ensured”, mentioned one participant.

One participant even said that “since the outbreak of the war, our organization has provided free legal services to refugees (information, guidance, temporary protection status). We still offer these services voluntarily and free of charge. The challenge is that we do not benefit from state support, and our resources are running out”.

Gagauzian CSOs raised concerns about meeting the needs of their usual beneficiaries as project funds were redirected to address the crisis. They also involved their beneficiaries in assisting refugees. Other worries for CSOs regarding the refugee crisis are not necessarily related to finances but still impact them. For instance, some distress about the attitude of locals regarding the support given to refugees and fraud concerning refugee support.

When asked in the CSO Compass Moldova survey about their donor collaborations in 2022-2023, CSOs revealed diverse partnerships (not all classic donors, but also subgrating organizations). The East European Foundation was the most frequently mentioned, with 28 references out of 713. UNDP Moldova and the Soros Foundation followed closely, with 24 and 23 mentions, respectively. Sixteen organizations mentioned the Solidarity Fund PL Moldova, 15 GIZ Moldova, and another 15 mentioned the European Union. Additionally, 14 mentions were about People in Need Moldova, 10 were about USAID, and nine were about CONTACT.

However, it is concerning that 48 organizations declared no collaboration with any donor organization in the period 2022-2023. This lack of cooperation could impact their financial stability and growth. The remaining 511 mentions were distributed among other international organizations, central and local public authorities, private companies from Moldova, and CSOs in the country. Each of these was mentioned 1 to 8 times.

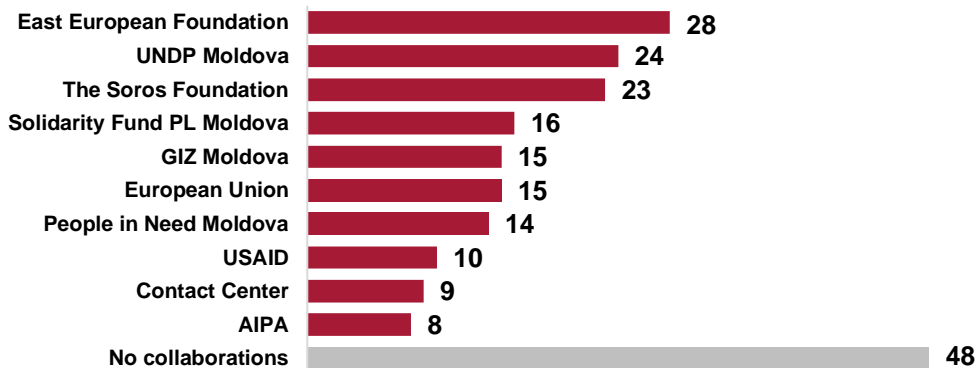


Figure __. Name the donor organizations you worked with in 2022 – 2023. N=713

When asked how Moldovan civil society organizations collaborate with international organizations (INGOs), 51.4% of local CSOs said they do so through regular event meetings. 42.4% keep in touch by exchanging experiences. 41.5% of Moldovan CSOs implement joint projects with international organizations. Thirty percent of local CSOs applied for funding in partnership with international organizations (See Q18 – Ways of cooperating with international organizations (INGOs)).

Regarding their relationship with donors, focus group participants mentioned some key lessons learned, including the importance of rigorous planning during the project design stage, consultation with beneficiaries and partners, proper task distribution within a project, and ensuring continuous communication with donors.

From a participant's perspective, NGOs face several challenges in their relationship with international organizations. Here are some opinions from the focus group discussions: "Foreign NGOs are monopolizing the civil sector and posing a threat to local NGOs"; "UN agencies apply for grants and become competitors for NGOs, participate in competitions, and influence the decisions of evaluation committees"; "Donors are not interested in CSO development. They follow their own goals". Interestingly, one participant mentioned that "there are large donors on the market in the Republic of Moldova that we must identify on social networks," implying that some donors are not well known among civil society, hindering good collaboration.

Focus group participants also revealed that "donors have developed strict rules for CSOs, more complex reporting and procurement policies." It was highlighted that even the largest NGOs in the country may not have all the required procedures and policies. Many participants underlined the need for capacity building in writing and implementing projects in the context of European pre-accession funds.

An important observation from a participant was that "there is no communication between NGOs, and efforts are not coordinated between NGOs carrying out similar activities to achieve a consolidated effort." Another challenge is that "Some commercial companies have found some CSOs to promote their interests, and this affects the overall image of CSOs."

Conclusions

The revenue of civil society organizations in Moldova varies widely, ranging from 0 lei to over 5 million lei. The nonprofit sector in Moldova has a diverse range of income sources, with grants from international development partners and donor organizations being the primary source of income for CSOs. Since the 1990s, foreign donors have supported consolidating civil society

organizations in Moldova through grants for CSO activities. As a result, writing grants has become a common practice for CSOs, as foreign donors understand the importance of a thriving civil society, particularly for a country aspiring to European integration.

While grants are a common way for organizations to raise funds, they often only meet some of the needs of Civil Society Organizations. Many grants do not allow organizations to invest in their resources, and donors typically allocate funds to specific areas, making other CSOs ineligible for funding. Furthermore, the stringent requirements for external grant applications present a challenge, particularly regarding internal regulations. State-driven funding mechanisms have programs that are not comprehensive enough, which prevents many CSOs from being able to apply for funding.

It's important to note that many CSOs also fundraise from membership fees, public budgets, or donations from individual and corporate donors. The 2% mechanism and CSO-driven economic activities are also crucial sources of financial resources. The legal framework allows a multitude of ways for CSOs to fundraise. Still, it needs improvement to motivate corporate and individual donors to donate. Moreover, citizens and companies hesitate to donate to social causes, especially in rural areas. Many don't trust civil society organizations, and involving businesses outside Chisinau in social projects is challenging. Also, running a fundraising campaign requires significant resources that most CSOs don't have. CSOs believe diversifying resources, developing financial sustainability capacity, and creating and implementing a fundraising plan are crucial to strengthening their financial sustainability. In addition, they hope for state support in ensuring the sustainability of CSOs through inclusive public financing mechanisms and direct support for administrative expenses.

Recommendations

Support from International Donors

- **Multi-Year Funding:** Encourage international donors to provide multi-year funding rather than one-off grants. This will ensure the stability and continuity of CSO projects and allow for long-term planning and investment in skilled personnel.
- **Capacity Building Grants:** Allocate funds for organizational development and capacity building, including technology upgrades, strengthening financial management systems, developing managerial, fundraising, and communication strategies, and training the CSO staff in project writing, management, and reporting, as well as fundraising, communication, and community outreach.
- **Support CSO operational costs:** Advocate for flexible funding approaches that enable CSOs to allocate resources as needed rather than restricting funds to specific project expenses. Consider increasing the percentage of grants for CSO administrative expenses and allowing CSOs to retain the equipment and other goods procured during the project. These measures will enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of CSO activities.
- **Simplified Grant Programs:** To encourage new and small organizations, consider simplifying the grant competitions and grant management administration to correspond to the level of development of different civil society organizations.
- **Learning by Doing:** Provide comprehensive feedback to organizations that failed to receive grants to help them understand where their application lacks and how they could improve.
- **Impact Support:** Offer resources and expertise for monitoring and evaluation to help CSOs demonstrate their impact, improve their effectiveness, build donor confidence, and attract additional support.
- **Raise Awareness about CSOs:** Support projects to increase public understanding of civil society organizations and their crucial role in a democratic society. This will help build trust in CSOs and encourage people to contribute financially, either through volunteering or other means, to support the work of civil society.

- **Communication and Visibility Expenses:** Increase communication and visibility budgets in your grant programs to improve CSO constituent engagement abilities and visibility among the general population.
- **Needs Assessment to Tailor Efficient Grant Programs:** Regularly involve CSOs in needs assessments and identifying potential support areas for future grant opportunities. This will help create inclusive funding programs that encourage the participation of CSOs specializing in various areas of activity.

Public Policies and State Support

- **Enhance the Implementation of the 2% Mechanism:** Encourage all taxpayers throughout Moldova to use the 2% designation mechanism with the assistance of the State Tax Authority and other public agencies. Share informative materials explaining the reasons for, methods of, and beneficiaries of the 2% designation. Develop an annual state-led campaign, with the support of the national public broadcasting service and media outlets, to promote the mechanism among taxpayers required to file income tax returns and those not legally obligated to do so. Additionally, the staff of international organizations in Moldova should be encouraged to lead by example and participate in the 2% designation annually.
- **Loans and Support for CSO-driven Economic Activity:** CSOs should be eligible recipients of state financial instruments that support loans and economic activities, such as the ODA Programs. Additionally, state-guaranteed loans designed explicitly for CSOs should be established.
- **Improve CSO Legislation:** Amend existing laws to clearly define what constitutes a civil society organization and ensure that entities engaged solely in economic activities cannot register as civil society organizations.
- **Tax Incentives and Benefits:** Introduce tax incentives for donations to CSOs, including tax deductions and credits for individuals and corporations. These incentives can encourage greater private giving and corporate sponsorship. Furthermore, consult with businesses to determine which incentives would motivate them to utilize sponsorship and donation legal frameworks to support civil society activities.
- **Bank Regulation:** Offer guidance for banks on reevaluating their approach to CSOs, avoiding uniform classification as high-risk entities. Encourage individual risk assessments tailored to each CSO's unique structure and operations.
- **Government Grants and Funding:** Enhance government grant programs supporting CSOs. Guarantee a transparent and accessible application process and long-term funding commitments to promote stability.
- **Capacity Building Support:** Design policies to support CSOs' capacity building. This includes training in financial management, grant writing, and strategic planning to help organizations become more self-reliant and efficient.
- **Training on Financial Reporting:** Civil society requires capacity training in financial reporting to increase transparency and ensure CSOs provide yearly financial data to state bodies.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES

The organizational capacity of CSOs plays a key role in their effectiveness and sustainability. The ability of CSOs to achieve their goals, provide meaningful services to society and contribute to social change depends directly on how well they are organized and managed. This is particularly important at a time of serious challenges facing the Republic of Moldova, with the war in Ukraine, the influx of refugees, and the deep political and economic crisis. In this context, organizational capacity includes a wide range of factors: from project management skills, human resource capacity to the existence of internal policies and strategic planning.

Analyzing the organizational capacities of CSOs in Moldova allows us to assess their internal resources and the external factors that influence their success. Improving these capacities is

critical to enhancing CSOs' contribution to public welfare, sustainable development, democratization, and human rights in the country.

Human Resources

Human resources are undoubtedly one of the most important components of CSO success. The effectiveness of NGOs directly depends on the quality and quantity of professionals involved in the implementation of their programs and initiatives.

CSO Members

The basis of human resources for CSOs is first of all the members of these organizations, especially if we take into account the fact that more than 90% of CSOs are public associations, which provide for the institution of membership. By becoming a member of an organization, a person actively demonstrates his/her civic position and has the opportunity to directly influence both what is happening around him/her and protect his/her rights. It is difficult to estimate how many people in the Republic of Moldova are members of CSOs, as there are no official statistics. For example, in Norway 80% of the adult population is a member of at least one CSO, in the Netherlands this share is somewhere around 50%, and in countries such as France, Germany and Great Britain this share varies from 20 to 35%.

According to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, 2 persons are enough to register a public association, but such cases are very few and mostly organizations form initiative groups of 3 or 5 persons for registration.

In order to clarify the situation in our research we asked CSOs about the number of members in their organizations.

341 CSOs reported two or more members in their organizations. While only 4 CSOs reported two members. Another 14 CSOs reported 0 or one member because, according to the law, private institutions and foundations do not have members.

In total, all CSOs in the study reported 4,491 members in their organizations, which is an average of 12-13 members per CSO. Taking into account these data, as well as data from the National Bureau of Statistics, some calculations can be made. Thus, according to the NBS data, in 2024 in Moldova there are registered about 2 million people aged 15 years and older. Taking into account the number of registered CSOs in Moldova, namely 12324 at the time of the survey, we can calculate that on average one CSO per 160 people. And if on average one CSO has 12-13 members, the share of the adult population that is a member of one or another CSO is 7,5 - 8%.

According to the study, more than 1/3 of CSOs, namely 34.4% have 3 to 5 members, which in terms of good governance in CSOs is the minimum condition for the formation of governing bodies. Notably, none of the participating CSOs reported a membership exceeding 50 people. Putting these results together, we see that most CSOs, almost 60.4%, have at most 9 members in their organizations.

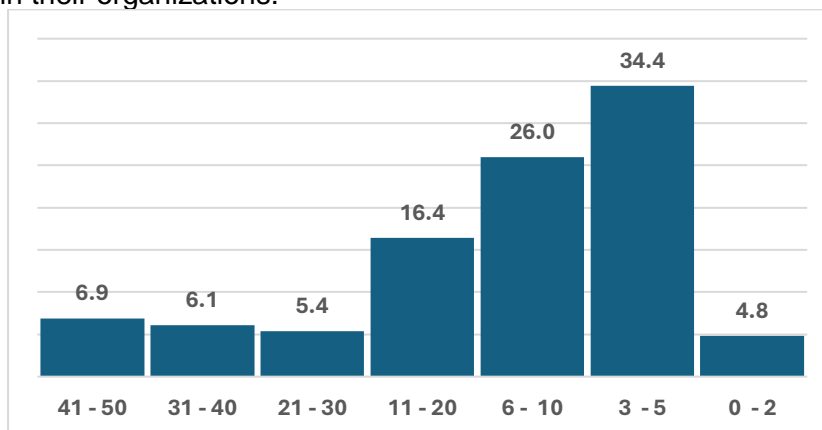


Figure __. How many members does your organization have? N= 354, %

Volunteers

Volunteers are an integral part of the sustainable and successful functioning of CSOs, and their contribution to the organizations' activities helps to solve important tasks and achieve positive social change. In the Republic of Moldova, as in other countries, volunteering is an important element of civil society. Volunteers make a significant contribution to solving social problems, supporting such areas as assistance to vulnerable groups, protection of human rights, environmental initiatives, educational and cultural programs. In order to stimulate the development of volunteering in the Republic of Moldova, a law on volunteering was adopted in 2010.

The organizations that participated in the focus groups confirmed the high role of volunteering, especially considering the limited financial resources available to the organizations. Nevertheless, almost 1/3 of the CSOs interviewed, namely 31.1%, indicated that they do not involve volunteers and the largest percentage of such organizations is from Chisinau. This is explained by the fact that some organizations, especially research centers, resource centers, foundations, most often do not attract volunteers, but base their activities exclusively on paid employees. Nevertheless, 8.8% of CSOs indicated that they involve more than 50 volunteers in their activities, 9.3% of CSOs reported having between 21 and 50 volunteers, and 16.9% of CSOs have between 11 and 20 volunteers.

Number of volunteers	Total %
0	31,1
1-5	19,8
6 - 10	14,1
11 - 20	16,9
21 - 50	9,3
> 50	8,8

Tabel __. Number of volunteers. N=354, %

Remunerated employees

Employees play a critical role in the operations of CSOs, helping them to remain sustainable, professional and effective in achieving their goals.

According to the study, 62.1% of CSOs indicated that they have full-time paid employees, while 37.8% of CSOs indicated that they have part-time paid employees. In total, out of the 354 CSOs surveyed, only 244 or 69% indicated that they have full-time or part-time employees of which 12% indicated that they have only full-time employees, 21% that they have part-time employees and 36% that they have both. In total, the 244 CSOs that reported having employees at the time of data collection had a total of 2,821 employees. Among these employees, 1,752 (62.1%) were full-time, and 1,069 (37.9%) were part-time. This is an average of about 8 paid employees per CSO. According to data provided by the Tax Inspectorate in 2023, 25,192 people were employed in the nonprofit sector. If we take into account the number of CSOs that filed their reports with the Tax Inspectorate, namely 4,580, then on average each CSO employed 5.5 people.

Also, we have considered such an important point in the research as the payment of the head of the organization. This is a critical issue for organizations because more often than not the leader of the organization determines how well the organization functions. During the focus group discussions this point was also partially touched upon, especially in the context of the fact that in many regional CSOs leaders are people who have a main job, most often in various public functions or in the field of education, culture, etc. and they do not have enough time to devote to the organization or the functions of their main job do not allow them to be engaged in CSOs.

The survey showed that only 34.7% of CSO leaders are employed full-time in their organizations. The situation is more or less good in Chisinau and Gagauzia, where 41.2% and 45.5% of CSOs indicated that their leaders are employed full-time, while the least number of CSOs with full-time leaders is in the South, where only 17.2 organizations confirmed this option. In 27.7% of CSOs, leaders work part-time, with the largest number of CSOs in the South and Gagauzia.

In the remaining 36.2% of CSOs, leaders are not employed by organizations and, apparently, fulfill their obligations on a volunteer basis.

As mentioned above, this situation is not satisfactory for the organizations and can negatively affect the management and sustainability of the organizations.

The data obtained through the research provides an opportunity to analyze the relationship between such indicators as the level of CSO budgets and CSO engagement. Thus, out of 143 CSOs that indicated budgets exceeding 500000 lei, only 21 CSOs indicated that their manager is not engaged, while 77 and 45 respectively indicated that their manager is engaged on a full or part-time basis.

Options	Total %
Not employed in your CSO	36,2
Full-time in your CSO	34,7
Part-time work in your CSO	27,7
I don't know	1,1
I don't answer	0,3

Tabel __. The OSC leader is employed. N=354,

Regional differences: The employment situation for staff is best in organizations from Gagauzia. According to the data obtained, all 11 CSOs, or 100%, have at least one part time or full time employee. The situation is also quite good in the municipality of Chisinau, where more than 3/4 or 75.4% of the total number of CSOs have employed staff. The situation in the South, North, and Central regions is almost the same, with 58.6%, 61.1%, and 58.9% of CSOs having employed staff, respectively.

Regions	Do you have employees?				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Center	43	58,9%	30	41,1%	73
Găgăuzia	11	100,0%			11
Mun. Chişinău	143	75,4%	46	24,6%	187
North	33	61,1%	21	38,9%	54
South	16	58,6%	13	44,8%	29
Total	244	69%	110	31%	354

Table __. Distribution of staffed employees per region. N=354, %

This difference between the regions and the center is primarily due to the limited access of regional CSOs to human resources. According to regional CSO representatives participating in the focus groups, this is one of the key problems faced by regional CSOs. Most often, it is almost impossible to find professional staff to work in CSO projects, and the few people who agree to work in regional CSOs, who are usually young people, do not stay for long. In turn, older people with the necessary knowledge or experience are usually employed in the public sector or prefer to work abroad.

The number of workers employed in organizations varies widely. Among those that have employed workers, 35,9% have between 1 and 5 employees. A small percentage, 1.4%, reported having more than 50 employees.

Number of employees	Number of CSO	% of CSO
0	110	31,1%
1-5	127	35,9%
6- 10	52	14,7%
11- 20	36	10,2%
21- 50	24	6,8%
>50	5	1,4%

In any case, indicators on the availability of paid workers do not provide a complete picture of the human resource situation. Another important indicator is meeting the human resource needs of CSOs. It often happens that after contracting with a donor, CSOs and especially regional CSOs do not find enough people for their team and several functions are assigned to one employee. There are also situations when the shortage of workers limits CSOs in finding additional resources for new projects.

In the survey we decided to find out to what extent the existing human resources meet the needs of CSOs. 28.2% of CSOs stated they have between 76% and 100% of the required staff, which in principle can be defined as a very good situation for these CSOs. The surprise was that 8.5% had more than 100% of the required staff. This response is most likely due to the fact that these organizations have a 100% fully staffed team. 13.8% of CSOs couldn't secure staff for their activities, and 13.0% had up to 25% of the required staff.

The slight discrepancy with the data presented just above regarding the fact that 30% of CSOs indicated a lack of paid staff is due to the fact that CSOs also consider volunteers as staff.

Interesting are the data by region, which show quite high satisfaction with human resources, especially for the regions North and South, where more than 38% of CSOs indicated that the number of employees covers from 75% to 100% of their needs, which is significantly higher than in the Center and Chisinau regions. Interesting indicators in Gagauzia, where all CSOs indicated that they have paid employees, but at the same time indicate that their teams are understaffed and lack people.

Option	Total %
Between 76% and 100% of required	28,2
Between 51% and 75% of required	21,8
0% of required	13,8
Between 1% and 25% of the required	13,0
Between 26% and 50% of the required	11,9
More than 100% of what is needed	8,5
I don't know	2,8

Tabel_. Is the number of employees in your organization sufficient to carry out the planned activities N=354, %

This data shows the high demand for human resources in all regions of the country and the high competition among CSOs for professional workers. Some organizations, and in particular in the regions, manage to concentrate certain resources in their organizations, thus limiting development opportunities for other CSOs in the region. In the center and Chisinau, there is a constant "hunger" and need for competent people among CSOs. This was confirmed by focus group participants who pointed to the fact that CSOs often discuss where to find the right person.

In order to further understand the reasons for the current human resources situation for CSOs, we turned to the survey participants who highlighted serious obstacles and challenges in the hiring process for CSOs, among which 71.8% of CSOs mentioned primarily the impossibility of providing salaries for long periods and 66.7% mentioned the impossibility of securing decent salaries. These indicators are particularly high in the regions, while in Chisinau, on the contrary, fewer CSOs mentioned this reason, which is primarily due to the fact that Chisinau has a concentration of more experienced and larger CSOs, which allow them to provide their employees with competitive salaries and contracts for long periods. At the same time, it is much more difficult for regional CSOs to obtain larger projects and funding for longer periods. During the focus groups, participants confirmed that despite the opportunities for regional CSOs to participate in grant programs, grant amounts are often not very high and contract lengths rarely exceed one year. These factors greatly affect the ability to engage staff and build sustainable teams in their CSOs. Another reason cited is the low capacity of CSOs to provide their employees with career development, which in most cases is related to the reasons mentioned above, as well as to the characteristics of CSOs themselves, which in most cases do not have a vertical structure that allows employees to climb the career ladder. This reason was cited by 64.6% of CSOs. Slightly

more than half of CSOs, namely 50.3%, indicated that the lack of professionals, specialists and experts in the country makes the process of hiring and finding new employees more difficult.

Also within the survey, 50.1% of CSOs confirmed the need for support in the field of human resource management, which implies training and capacity building programs for CSOs and the development or updating of internal policies in this area. CSOs from the South, North and Center regions have a particularly high need, ranging from 62.4% to 72.5%, and CSOs from Chisinau and Gagauzia have a much lower need.

Statements	%
The impossibility of securing a decent salary	66.7
Impossibility of securing a long-term salary (short contracts with donors)	71.8
Limited career growth opportunities for employees	64.6
Lack of specialists/experts in the field in which we operate	50.3
Other	47

Tabel 1. Which of the following statements about understaffing or employment issues are accurate for your organization? N=354, %

Other reasons CSOs cited included a very low level of candidates competing for vacant positions, high competition among CSOs for human resources, and as a result, salary increases in CSOs that many CSOs, especially in the regions, cannot afford. CSOs also pointed to low motivation in CSOs, low diversification of resources in the organization and consequent financial instability. In focus group discussions with CSO representatives, the problem of perception of CSOs was also discussed, both by people directly involved in CSO activities and by ordinary citizens who are potential candidates to work in organizations. Very often, in their opinion, these activities are associated with hobbies, and are not perceived as an opportunity for core activities, long-term work and career development. The baseline survey conducted by Contact Center 2023 as part of the USAID project showed a very low awareness among citizens about what CSOs are. These factors significantly reduce the interest of citizens, youth, and potential employees in CSOs.

Internal Policies

Internal policies in CSOs are the key mechanisms that govern their operations and ensure effective governance. These policies define the rules and procedures by which the organization conducts its work, interacts with staff, partners and beneficiaries, and manages its resources. In addition, internal policies help to maintain a high level of trust among donors and constituents, which is particularly important in the context of increased attention to accountability and sustainable development of the sector. Developing and adhering to internal policies is an important step for CSOs to operate in compliance with legal regulations, minimize risks, manage resources more efficiently and ensure fair and transparent decision-making processes and secure its reputation as a reliable and professional partner.

Internal policies include a wide range of issues such as human resource management, financial management and control, project management, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects aimed at achieving the NPO's mission.

Recently, donor demands from CSOs in terms of accountability, transparency, organizational management and capacity have seriously increased. While in the past, according to CSO representatives participating in the focus groups, donors had little or no special requirements for local CSOs, now it is very common to request a procurement policy, policies confirming the existence of financial control in the organization, a strategic plan, internal regulations and procedures, particularly in the area of human resources management, etc. Many CSOs are therefore tasked with developing basic policies in response to donor requirements. The internal needs of CSOs for such policies, for internal development and in view of the great competition for resources, should not be ignored. There is also a recent tendency among donors to introduce elements of organizational development for grantee CSOs into their grant programs, most often

including the development of internal policy procedures, which also has a significant impact on strengthening the organizational capacity of such organizations. These findings are supported in one way or another by USAID reports from the recent period.

The survey of CSOs participating in the study also confirmed these findings to a greater extent and showed quite high rates of existence and use of internal policies in CSOs. It is particularly important to note that 76.2% of CSOs indicated the existence of a strategic plan in their organizations. However, it should be noted that strategies are most often developed with donor support and for a period of no more than 3 - 5 years. Unfortunately, there is no data to know the number of CSOs that had a strategic plan in the past, but based on the opinions of CSO representatives, the attitude towards the need for strategic planning in CSOs has changed very positively in recent years.

This is confirmed by the CSO representatives who participated in the focus groups, who confirmed that recently, on the recommendation of donors, experts and colleagues from other CSOs, they have developed strategic plans, which was not the case in their organizations before. Nevertheless, 56.1% of CSOs indicated in the survey a need for support in developing a strategic plan. This need is particularly high in the regions. For example, 78.0% of CSOs from the South region and 68.8% from the North region expressed a need for this. This is primarily due to the fact that strategic plans are usually 3-5 years in length and many CSOs are faced with the question of whether they need to update their strategy or develop a new one, but lack the skills and resources to do so. Financial management policies are also very impressive, with 69.2% of CSOs developing an annual budget and 61.9% of CSOs having a procurement policy. It is also very important to note that more than half of the CSOs pay significant attention to the observance of conflicts of interest.

As noted above, 69% of CSOs noted that they have paid staff and the fact that only 56.2% of CSOs noted the existence of human resource management policies and 50.8% of CSOs noted the existence of an Internal Procedures Manual suggests that more attention needs to be paid to this type of policy in organizations.

The importance of CSOs' ability and capacity to monitor and evaluate their program activities should also be emphasized. Although 83.3% of CSOs indicated that they had financial resources to implement their program activities in 2023, only 54.5% of CSOs indicated that they have appropriate internal policies on Monitoring and Evaluation. In addition, some of the focus group discussion participants made it clear that more often than not, these policies include compliance with procedures and requirements set by donors within projects. There is also a high indicator of the need to develop CSOs' skills and capacities in evaluation and monitoring, especially in the regions. Thus 78.6 CSOs from the South region, 70.6% from the North region and 68.5% from the Centre region expressed a high need for support to develop their organizations in this area. To a lesser extent, CSOs from Chisinau, only 41.6%, and CSOs from Gagauzia, 45.4%, need it.

An EU study conducted in 2017 showed that more than 50% of CSOs do not use any IT tools and applications to work with their constituents and stakeholders. The pandemic of 2000 - 2021, forced CSOs to find new ways and tools to engage with their constituents and the use of online counseling, training and meetings increased many times compared to the pre-pandemic period. The Compass study did not conduct a study that could confirm these findings, but it is supported by objective observations that are noted in many secondary reports and particularly in the USAID 2021 report. Nevertheless, given the widespread use of various IT tools by CSOs, the issue of digital security and hygiene has arisen and the study found that only 34.5% of CSOs have internal policies governing digital security and 59.6% expressed a need for support for their organizations in the area of digitalization and digital security, especially CSOs from regions where the share of such organizations reaches 2/3 or more.

If we take into account the differences that exist between the existence of internal policies among CSOs from different regions and Chisinau, it should be noted that these differences are not very large and are mostly related to the level of development of CSOs. That is, large and medium-sized organizations, which have substantial budgets for the implementation of their programs and projects, pay more attention to internal policies due to the substantial requirements of the constituents. More details can be found in the tables in the annexed tables..

In general, despite rather optimistic indicators about the existence of some policies within organizations, nevertheless 55.9% of CSOs indicated a need for support in developing internal policies within the organization. CSOs from the Southern region (82.8%), as well as the Center region (69.3%) and the North region (63.5%) expressed a particularly high need for such support. CSOs from Chisinau and Gagauzia expressed a lower need for such support.

Internal policies and documents	%
Strategic plan	76,2
Fundraising strategy	65,2
Communication strategy	65,7
Human resources policies	56,2
Manual of internal procedures	50,8
Anti-fraud policies and conflict of interest	52,5
Monitoring and evaluation policies	54,5
Digital security policies	34,5
Harassment Prevention Policies	42,7
Gender Equality Policy	49,7
Annual operational plan	68,4
The annual budget	69,2
Procurement policy	61,9

*Tabel_ Which internal policy and management documents do you use in your organization?
N=354, %*

Material and technical resources

Another essential factor ensuring sustainable development is the availability of appropriate infrastructure and material and technical resources. It is not a secret that for any CSO to work effectively nowadays it is necessary to have basic office equipment such as a computer or laptop, printer and photocopier, Internet access, etc. For some organizations, especially those providing services to their beneficiaries, it is very important to have office space to carry out such activities, while other CSOs need vehicles. Donors providing grant support to CSOs pay considerable attention to providing the necessary material and technical base for project implementation, and the purchase of equipment within the framework of projects has become a common necessity, provided that CSOs justify the need for it. Most often such equipment remains at the disposal of the organization after the end of projects, but there are some donors, such as the EU, whose contract provides for donation of purchased equipment after the end of the project. But these conditions most often apply to large CSOs as well as international CSOs. Exceptions are sometimes made for local CSOs, provided that the purpose of using this equipment is justified. For example, 76.6% of CSOs confirmed that they have necessary office equipment, such as a printer and photocopier, and 76.5% confirmed that the head of the organization also has a personal computer or laptop. A slightly smaller number of CSOs, namely 64.1% confirmed the availability of necessary equipment for other CSO staff. This difference is primarily due to the fact that CSOs, especially in rural areas, have one set of equipment that is most often used by the head of the organization. Nevertheless, the fact that almost ¼ of CSOs do not have basic office equipment is unacceptable nowadays and significantly reduces the opportunities for CSOs, both in the implementation of their activities and in terms of participation in grant programs. Analysis of the data obtained in the framework of the survey shows a correlation between the lack of office equipment and the financial condition of CSOs. For example, of the 83 CSOs that indicated that their organizations do not have equipment for management and manager, 28 CSOs or almost 34% indicated an annual budget in 2023 of 0 lei, and 37 CSOs (44,5%) indicated a budget of no more than 200000 lei and vice versa 65% of the organizations that indicated the presence of such equipment indicated budgets exceeding 200000 lei per year.

Regarding office space, both for the permanent work of the CSO team and for program activities, according to the CSO Sustainability Index, this is one of the key problems of CSO material support. This is primarily due to the fact that most CSOs cannot afford their own offices, but have

to rent them, most often for short periods of time within the project. Some CSOs are able to contract office rentals for a short period of time. Some CSOs manage to sign contracts to rent publicly owned offices with local authorities for a longer period of time and at an affordable price. According to the survey, 75.2% of organizations indicated having an office, of which 26% indicated having their own office and 49.2% a rented office.

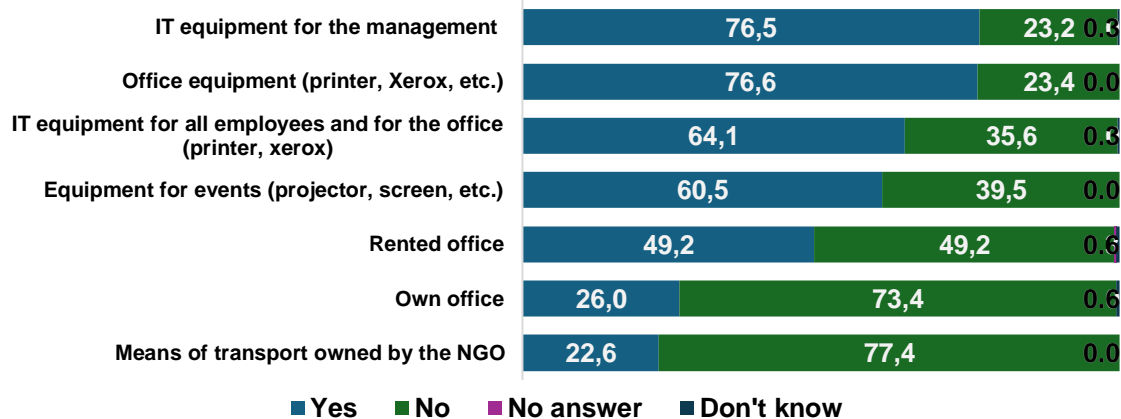


Figure __. Does your organization own...? N=354, %

Own transport is very rare for many organizations and this type of material resources is very rarely funded by donors. Nevertheless, CSOs working at the national or regional level, as well as CSOs whose specifics require special transportation to implement their activities, own cars. Thus, 22.6% of CSOs participating in the survey indicated that they have their own vehicles.

Most of the indicators analyzed by region did not show significant differences between the CSOs in Chisinau and the regions. The only notable indicator is related to CSOs that own an office car, where CSOs in Chisinau and in South and North regions are in a much better situation than those in the other regions. This can be explained by the need for constant travel in the regions.

Conclusions

In Moldova, the nonprofit sector faces a serious challenge in the area of human resources. The high demands placed by donors on CSOs presuppose the availability of qualified and trained staff in organizations, the lack of which is one of the key problems, which is particularly evident in rural areas. This is primarily due to such factors as low and unstable salaries, short labor contracts, and virtually no opportunities for career advancement. This in turn is exacerbated by the exodus of qualified personnel to the public and private sector or abroad, creating a shortage of professionals in the non-profit sector. As a result, many CSOs are forced to depend on volunteers and temporary staff, making it difficult to build stable and long-term working teams. Competition for human resources among CSOs forces CSOs to offer potential employees various motivational programs, including competitive salaries, comfortable working conditions, travel arrangements, payment for personal development programs, and others. Unfortunately, such motivational programs are available most often to large national or international CSOs.

Also a significant problem for the development of human resources in CSOs is the low awareness of the population about CSOs and the perception of the sector as a hobby rather than as a potential employer.

Recommendations

Despite these challenges, CSOs in Moldova are taking steps to develop their human resource capacity. Many organizations are actively investing in the training and professional development of their staff, working with international donors and partners.

Also, although young people are most often undertrained and their stay in the organization is temporary, an important role in human resource development for CSOs is the involvement of young people and volunteers who bring fresh ideas and energy to the organizations' activities. In addition, the non-profit sector in Moldova should be promoted as much as possible, including as

an economic sector that contributes, among other things, to job creation through the organization of information campaigns.

Also, CSOs should more actively promote themselves on the labor market as employers by organizing and participating in job fairs.

Internship opportunities for young people in CSOs should be more actively promoted, including paid internships, which could stimulate the interest of young people in CSOs.

Internal policies, according to the survey results, are a strength of CSOs, which is mostly driven by high donor demands. At the same time, there are areas where CSOs need to pay more attention, such as human resources, digital security, financial management and control policies.

Despite fairly positive results in the area of equipping CSOs with office equipment, it is necessary to pay attention to both updating office equipment in those CSOs that already have it and equipping CSOs that do not have it. In particular, special programs can be organized to donate used equipment to start-up and rural CSOs. Very often large companies, banks, public institutions, etc. write off equipment as part of their equipment renewal instead of providing this equipment to CSOs in need. In turn, the legislation does not provide for a special procedure in this regard and many companies refuse such procedures due to strong bureaucracy and disadvantage.

Also, the authorities could develop and implement a technical support program for start-up or rural CSOs as part of the CSO development program in Moldova.

Regarding the provision of office space for CSOs, one of the most promising solutions is to incentivize and encourage local authorities to allocate space for CSOs. Although this possibility exists today, the authorities are reluctant to provide vacant premises to CSOs, prioritizing economic agents or providing premises that are not quite suitable or in need of serious renovation. Also promising is the creation or development of existing hubs for start-up CSOs, where organizations could use office space for their activities for a small fee or free of charge.

External Factors Influencing CSOs

The activities of Civil Society Organizations largely depend on the external environment, which defines the conditions for their existence, growth, and sustainable development. External factors, in addition to the legal framework, include a wide range of political, economic, and social factors that have both positive and negative impacts on the organizations' activities. Understanding these factors allows CSOs to adapt more effectively to challenges and take advantage of opportunities to achieve their objectives.

CSOs often face attacks from politicians, which can influence both public perception and funding. Politicians may use anti-NGO rhetoric to discredit organizations, which can affect public trust and community support. Additionally, legislative changes or government policies can create a more or less favorable climate for CSO activities.

For example, the CRJM organization publishes an annual report titled “Radiografia atacurilor asupra organizațiilor societății civile și apărătorilor drepturilor omului din Republica Moldova,”³⁷ which documents these incidents and contributes to understanding the context in which CSOs operate. According to reports, CSOs that focus on human rights protection, justice reform, anti-corruption efforts, and similar areas are the most frequently attacked. In the CSO Compass study, 15.2% of CSOs confirmed that they had been subjected to insults, harassment, verbal threats, or online abuse, while 3.4% indicated that they had experienced physical assaults. Unfortunately, such acts of aggression against CSOs often involve politicians and public officials. Specifically, 12.7% of CSOs reported pressure from public officials, and the CRJM report indicates that politicians are frequently implicated in these aggressions.

Despite the seemingly low numbers, the mere occurrence of such incidents raises questions about the extent to which CSOs are protected from forms of violence and aggression. Moldova's

³⁷ <https://crjm.org/radiografia-atacurilor-asupra-organizatiilor-societatii-civile-si-aparatorilor-drepturilor-omului-din-republica-moldova-in-2023/21397/>

legislation, however, does not provide special protective mechanisms for CSOs or human rights defenders; in these cases, general legislation applies.

Cyberattacks on the servers, websites, and social media accounts of CSOs and their representatives have also become more frequent recently. This is primarily due to the fact that much information is currently stored electronically and online. Consequently, various types of scammers use this information to blackmail or attack CSOs, aiming to limit their ability to operate normally. Such cases have been confirmed by 13% of organizations, particularly among CSOs in Chişinău.

Vandalism or other forms of aggression against the offices and workspaces of CSOs are also encountered, although fortunately, such incidents are rare, with only 4.3% of CSOs reporting them.

The economic state of the country directly influences the financial resources available to CSOs. Economic crises can lead to a decrease in government funding and private donations, forcing organizations to adapt by diversifying their funding sources. Furthermore, the economic situation can determine the level of community engagement and their capacity to contribute to local initiatives.

This is primarily due to the fact that civil society organizations (CSOs) are directly involved in the socio-economic and political life of the country and are an important actor within it. By actively participating in promoting various reforms and impartially monitoring the activities of authorities, some CSOs are affected by the political situation, and similarly, many CSOs providing social services and engaged in developing social and economic infrastructure are impacted by phenomena such as inflation, migration, and poverty.

Nearly 42% of CSOs indicated that they are most affected by the economic recession, the main effects of which include consequences such as rising service prices, the migration of the active population, deteriorating welfare for beneficiaries, low purchasing power for both CSOs and their beneficiaries, a lack of engagement and opportunities for potential donors, both individual and corporate, among others.

The war in Ukraine also has a significant impact on the activities of CSOs, according to 36.8% of them. During focus group discussions, CSOs noted that, although the “positive” financial impact for some organizations was significant in the first year of the war, they are now experiencing only negative effects, primarily psychological due to the uncertainty of expectations.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 severely affected many CSOs, forcing them to suspend or significantly reduce their activities. Some organizations were unable to pivot to a new format of activities during the pandemic.

Despite the active involvement of CSOs in the public life of the country, only 18.8% of them believe that political factors have a strong impact on CSOs. This can primarily be explained by the fact that most CSOs in the country are engaged in social issues and rarely involve themselves in public policy. However, for other CSOs, especially those active in advocacy, human rights, and anti-corruption, the political context can have a significant impact. This is particularly important in the context of Moldova's candidacy for EU membership and the struggle between political forces that support or oppose this accession.

Despite remaining impartial and apolitical, many CSOs are affected by this struggle of political forces and are constantly accused of engaging in political activities, even though there is no direct evidence of their involvement in political power struggles. It is noteworthy that, according to research data, CSOs in Găgăuzia are the most affected by this factor, especially considering that after the 2023 elections for the Gagauzian Bashkan, many donors halted their assistance programs in the region.

Additionally, it should be considered that there have been instances where previous governments promoted the idea of limiting CSO involvement in public policy by penalizing them for participating in advocacy processes. Some current politicians are also advocating for the development and implementation of the so-called “Foreign Agents Law” in Moldova.

In this context, it should also be noted that legislation limits the direct participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in political struggles, as they are not allowed to participate in elections or promote candidates. CSOs are also prohibited from providing services to political parties during electoral campaigns. The opinions of focus group participants largely confirm these findings, as

CSOs believe that any involvement in public policy or decision-making processes is considered a political activity by local politicians.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that only 17% of CSOs believe that digitalization processes do not bypass them and have a strong impact on their activities. Given the pace of digitalization in the country, this low percentage can only indicate that CSOs are not yet sufficiently digitalized.

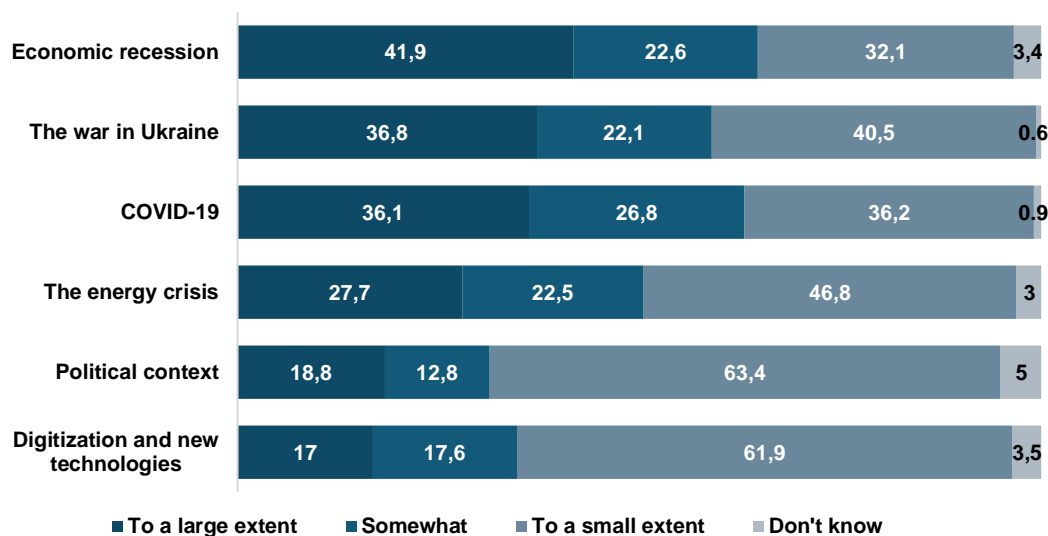


Figure __. Has the way your organization operates been significantly impacted? N=354, %

Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past seven years, cases of attacks and threats against representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) have been recorded and documented, and the number of such cases has not decreased; this research has only confirmed their existence. Unfortunately, legislation does not provide real mechanisms to halt these threats against CSOs. Therefore, it is necessary to consider practices implemented in European Union countries aimed at eradicating such incidents and to develop and implement similar mechanisms in Moldova.

To reduce the impact of external factors on CSOs, both the organizations themselves and the donors supporting them should pay attention to developing a response mechanism to address the increased impact of these factors and foresee possible expenditures to mitigate their harmful effects on CSOs, particularly in relation to economic and social crises.

Regarding the “politicization” of CSOs, they should maintain their status as politically unaffiliated organizations and comply with the legislation of the Republic of Moldova while actively participating in the public life of the country.

At the same time, CSOs need to strengthen their digital inclusion processes and capacity to utilize digital tools for daily activities, as well as government-provided digital resources, and enhance their ability to respond to the threat of cyberattacks.

Communication and Visibility

Effective communication and high visibility enable CSOs not only to increase their influence on societal processes but also to strengthen trust from key stakeholders, including donors and partners. A high level of trust and transparency encourages more active public participation in CSO activities and attracts new sources of funding.

According to the latest BOP³⁸ data from August 2023, trust in CSOs stands at 25.4%, which is slightly better than the previous result from 2022, when the trust level was 24%. However, these results are still quite poor, considering that CSOs are near the bottom of the list in terms of trust

³⁸ <http://bop.ipp.md/>

compared to other institutions and organizations. At the same time, it is important to consider that some studies indicate that almost half of Moldova's population has no idea what a CSO is. In other words, if we only consider the opinions of people who know what a CSO is, the level of trust could be twice as high. These conclusions are supported by a baseline study³⁹ conducted by the CONTACT Center in 2023, which surveyed people who are at least somewhat familiar with what a CSO is. Among this audience, trust in CSOs reached 52.6%.

The basic for communication in CSOs is their communication strategy, which includes both external communication with the public, donors, media, government bodies, and other stakeholders, as well as internal communication to establish processes within the organization itself. According to the survey, 65.7% of CSOs confirmed having communication strategies in place, indicating a fairly high interest among Moldovan CSOs in communication with the external world. However, the implementation of such strategies requires relevant knowledge, trained personnel, and necessary financial resources within the organization. At least 67% of CSOs confirmed that they have the necessary knowledge and expertise in their organizations, and 53.2% reported having the required human resources. Nevertheless, only 18.3% of CSOs noted that they have the financial resources needed to cover expenses for visibility and the implementation of their communication strategies.

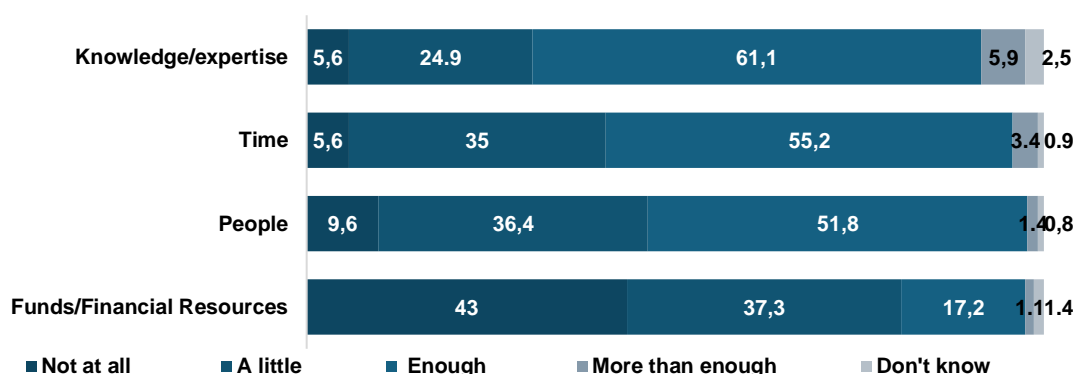


Figure ____. To communicate strategically with international colleagues, does your organization have...? N=354, %

The significant interest of CSOs in communication with the external world is further confirmed by data showing that 91.8% of CSOs use social media for communication, and 50.6% mentioned having websites. These platforms have recently become the primary source of information for most people, as confirmed by BOP data from 2023.

Means of promotion your organization used in 2023	Total %
Web page	50,6
Social networks	91,8
Public events (fairs, exhibitions. Forums, etc.)	38,4
Own newsletter	9,6
Online banners, another form of digital promotion	22,0
Radio	20,1
The written press	22,3
TV	25,7
Online press	24,9
Influencer	5,9
Other	2,8
We did not carry out promotional activities	5,4

Table ____. Means of promotion of CSOs used in 2023. N=354, %

³⁹ <https://contact.md/sondaj-pestre-50-la-suta-dintre-moldoveni-au-incredere-in-osc-uri/>

During focus group discussions, CSO representatives confirmed that they pay special attention to sharing information about their activities on social media. At the same time, it was noted that the reach of social media is relatively limited, covering a narrow category of constituents, and achieving a wider audience requires paid promotion, such as on Facebook. Unfortunately, many CSOs, especially those in rural areas, as well as newer CSOs and initiative groups, cannot afford such expenses.

The research also showed that despite the clear dominance of social media in communication, CSOs use a wide range of other tools and methods to promote themselves and their achievements. For example, 38.4% of CSOs use opportunities to promote their organization at various events, such as fairs, forums, and exhibitions, which allow them to directly engage with their constituents without significant additional costs. Traditional mass media, such as TV, radio, and print, also remain important for CSO promotion and communication. For instance, 1/4 of CSOs consider TV a very important tool for their communication activities. Additionally, 65.8% of CSOs confirmed having very good or good relationships with the media.

Some CSOs use newsletters to inform their beneficiaries, with 9.6% of organizations reporting this practice.

It is also noteworthy that CSOs generally neglect collaboration with active influencers, who currently have significant influence on public opinion. These include bloggers, vloggers, TikTokers, etc. Only 5.9% of CSOs indicated that they use such people to promote their activities. Surprisingly, 5.4% of the organizations did not engage in any promotional activities.

Despite these more or less optimistic indicators, trust in CSOs remains very low, as mentioned above. According to the 2022 USAID CSO Sustainability Index⁴⁰, CSOs' promotion of their work and other public relations activities is deficient, primarily because CSOs rely on project-based funding, which provides limited resources for hiring specialized communications personnel. This assertion is indirectly confirmed by the fact that 55.3% of CSOs participating in the survey indicated a high need for support in the field of public communication. This need is especially high among CSOs from the southern region (72.4%), the north (70.5%), and the central region (64.1%). Fewer than half of the CSOs in Chişinău (45.7%) and Gagauzia (45.4%) expressed such a need.

Transparency and accountability to their constituents play an important role in increasing trust in CSOs. As mentioned earlier, the legislation concerning nonprofit organizations does not mandate CSOs to report on their activities unless they receive public funds. Despite the fact that the 2% mechanism involves public funds, and more than 1,028 CSOs received allocations from individual income taxes in 2022, not all of these CSOs prepare and publish their reports. This includes some CSOs that received significant amounts through this mechanism. The reason for this is the absence of a mechanism for monitoring and controlling such reporting. However, the law does require any CSO to provide an activity report upon request by stakeholders. Failure to submit such a report to government institutions could lead to the suspension of the organization's activities by court order.

The research data confirms partial conclusions about CSOs' neglect of the need to prepare and publish annual activity reports, as well as the sensitivity of this issue for organizations.

According to the data, 1/4 of CSOs simply ignored this question. Of those that responded, only 23.7% confirmed that they had published their report on their website. When considering the total number of CSOs participating in the research, this share is even smaller—17.7%. When analyzing the profile of the CSOs that have published their reports, these are primarily organizations that have the human and financial resources to do so. The location of the CSO plays a lesser role in this matter, as the situation is similar across most regions. However, none of the 11 CSOs in Gagauzia have published their reports.

Another 30.4% of CSOs that responded to the question have an annual activity report for 2023, but it is for internal use only, and in 30.1% of organizations, such a report is available only upon request. Meanwhile, in 13.9% of organizations, such reports have not been developed or published.

The main reasons why CSOs with reports do not publish them are primarily the lack of experience, knowledge, and skills to prepare reports that could be presented to the general public. This is

⁴⁰ https://management.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2022-CSOSI_Moldova_eng.pdf

confirmed by at least two factors. First, whenever the Contact Center announces consultations on the preparation and design of annual reports, the interest is very high. The latest consultation on this topic attracted more than 50 CSOs. This hypothesis was also confirmed by a focus group participant from the southern region, who said that they have brief information on what they have accomplished over the year, as well as reports they prepared for donors, but they lack the skills and knowledge to process all this information and do not have the necessary financial and human resources.

Has your organization prepared an annual activity report for the year 2023?	Total %, N-266	Total %, N-354
Yes, but it is for internal use only	30,4	22,8
Yes, it is available upon request	30,1	22,6
Yes, it is published on the organization's website	23,7	17,7
Not	13,9	10
I don't know	1,9	1,3
No answer		24,8

Table__. Has your organization prepared an annual activity report for the year 2023? N=266, N=354 %

Conclusions

Despite the considerable efforts CSOs make to promote their activities and engage with their target audiences, trust in CSOs remains at a very low level, as indicated by BOP data and other studies. Over the last 10 years, there has been little significant improvement in this area.

This is primarily due to the fact that many CSOs face the problem of low recognition and visibility, especially among a wide audience. According to various data, about half of the population of Moldova still does not understand what CSOs are and their importance for society, which gives rise to a lot of rumors and false information about CSOs. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, among which it is necessary to highlight the lack of financial and human resources to develop a full-fledged communication strategy, which limits their ability to interact with stakeholders.

Despite the dominance of social networks and websites in promoting CSOs, there is a lack of a systematic approach to managing social networks, websites and other communication channels, which reduces trust in NGOs and complicates the process of creating a sustainable image. Many organizations do not conduct a deep assessment of their communication activities, paying attention only to the number of views and likes on social networks.

Additionally, many CSOs neglect publishing their annual reports on public platforms, citing a lack of necessary skills and resources or simply ignoring this responsibility.

Recommendations

Visibility and promotion of CSOs should receive increased attention. In an environment of intense competition for funding from foreign donors and the need to diversify income sources, effective communication with constituents becomes one of the keys to ensuring the sector's financial sustainability.

- CSOs should invest in training their staff in public relations, social media management, and digital marketing.
- Necessary to provide assistance to CSOs, especially in the regions, in developing communication strategies and other necessary internal policies, procedures and documents in the field of communications, as well as provide consulting support
- CSOs need to broaden their audience base, rather than focusing solely on a specific target group. This will help increase trust in the organization and attract potential donors
- It is important to continue developing and investing in social media, websites, and other digital platforms to stay connected with target audiences. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube can help CSOs reach a wider audience and improve engagement with volunteers and donors. However, it is important to explore the full

potential of these platforms and secure the financial resources needed to increase their reach.

- CSOs should focus on developing and promoting content that resonates with their audience's interests and needs. This could include success stories or videos showcasing the organization's achievements.
- Publishing annual activity reports should become routine for all active CSOs. To simplify this process, a model report template could be developed in collaboration with the ASP. For CSOs that do not have the means to publish reports on their own websites or social media, they could use the NGO.md portal, where more than 240 organizations already have accounts.
- Encourage the publication of annual reports: This could be done by organizing competitions for the best annual reports, which would motivate CSOs to share their work publicly.
- Engage local and national media for promotion: CSOs should focus on working with local and national media outlets, including online platforms, to promote their activities, potentially through joint projects. Additionally, engaging a new generation of bloggers and vloggers can significantly help increase public visibility for CSOs.

POLITICI PUBLICE/ADVOCACY

The cooperation between public authorities and civil society is essential for developing public policies that address the needs of citizens. Civil society organizations play a pivotal role in identifying solutions to citizens' problems and influencing public authorities in shaping relevant policies and decisions.

In the Republic of Moldova, the mechanisms and instruments for cooperation between public authorities and civil society organizations are very well regulated at legislative and regulatory level. Thus, the Laws on non-commercial organizations⁴¹, on access to information of public interest⁴² and the Law on transparency in decision-making⁴³ provide ample opportunities for civil society participation in public policies. Furthermore, on June 28, 2023, the Government approved the Regulation⁴⁴ on the organization of the activity of permanent consultative platforms within the central public administration authority.

A key policy document reinforcing the interaction between civil society and public authorities is the Civil Society Development Program 2024-2027⁴⁵. However, the primary issue it addresses is the limited impact of civil society on the design, implementation, and monitoring of public policies at both the national and local levels. This challenge has two main dimensions. On the one hand, civil society is not yet fully capacitated and empowered with the necessary tools and knowledge to ensure an active involvement in decision-making processes at different levels of public administration. On the other hand, the current level of involvement and participation of civil society is further hampered by the lack of a proactive attitude on the part of the authorities, including the limited ability to generate innovative mechanisms to facilitate the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in the decision-making process.

These concerns are echoed in the 2023 CSO Meter Report⁴⁶, which scored the right to participate in decision-making at 4.9 out of 7. While the legislative framework scored 5.5 out of 7, the practical implementation only achieved 4.4, highlighting a gap between legal provisions and their execution.

⁴¹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=122391&lang=ro

⁴² https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=137908&lang=ro

⁴³ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=106638&lang=ro

⁴⁴ https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/subiect-09-nu-157-cs-2023_0.pdf

⁴⁵ <https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/subiect-18-nu-843-cs-2023.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2023->

[12/CSO%20Meter%20Moldova%20Country%20Report%202023%20EN_1.pdf](https://csometer.info/sites/default/files/2023-12/CSO%20Meter%20Moldova%20Country%20Report%202023%20EN_1.pdf)

Despite the barriers to participation, survey data indicate a relatively high level of interaction between CSOs and public authorities, particularly at the local level. Notably, 28% of CSOs report a very good relationship, and 35% a good relationship, with first-level local authorities. However, relationships with second-level local authorities and central authorities are weaker, with only 16.9% and 11.9% of CSOs, respectively, reporting very good relations. This disparity in engagement is partly due to the nature of CSO relationships with local and regional authorities, especially outside the capital, Chisinau. In regional areas, CSOs more frequently collaborate with local administrations as project partners or beneficiaries. According to survey data, 66.7% of CSOs have worked directly with public authorities within their projects, 61.9% have had public institutions as project beneficiaries, and 33.6% have provided services to the authorities.

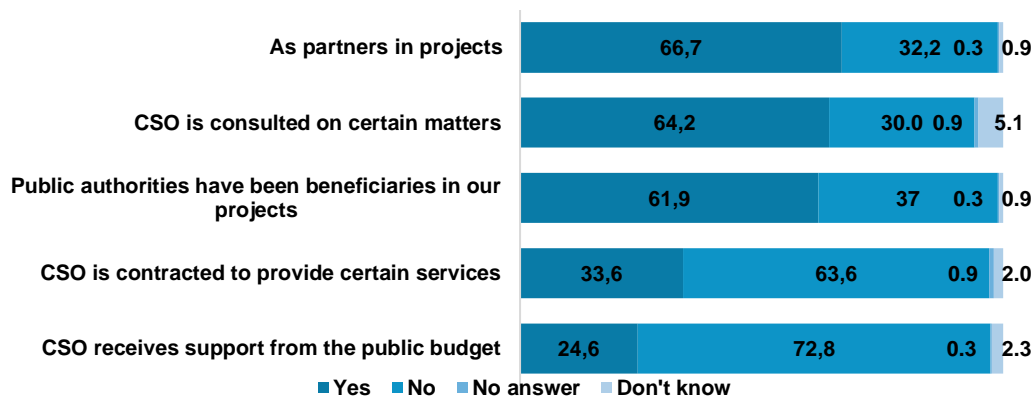


Figure __. In 2023, did you collaborate directly with public authorities within your organization's projects? N=354, %

Focus group participants from the southern region confirmed that local authorities are generally willing to collaborate with civil society organizations (CSOs) on various projects, particularly those related to infrastructure development. On the other hand, participants from national-level organizations and the northern region rated the collaboration between civil society, the private sector, and Moldovan authorities as good. In contrast, organizations in Gagauzia rated the collaboration as weaker.

Survey results show that CSOs engage with authorities beyond project implementation. More than half (64.2%) reported being consulted on specific issues. This high rate of consultation is largely due to the perception among CSOs that participation in community development strategies and public hearings constitutes meaningful consultation. Focus group participants from the regions confirmed that authorities involve them in developing local strategies and in participatory budgeting processes.

A successful example of CSO participation in public policy is the functioning of the District Council for Participation in Cahul⁴⁷, which was highlighted by focus group participants as a best practice. In Chisinau, participants noted that national authorities include CSOs in working groups within ministries and parliamentary commissions.

CSOs most frequently use information campaigns and public events (36.7%) as methods of communication and participation, largely because these methods allow for creativity and independence from direct government interaction. However, more direct forms of participation, such as public hearings, council meetings, or parliamentary sessions, are less common. Only 15.5% of CSOs regularly attend parliamentary hearings, while 28.2% participate in public hearings organized by authorities or in local and district council meetings.

⁴⁷ <https://crp-cahul.md/>

Joint petitions and appeals are another form of CSO participation, with 22% of organizations frequently using this method. Focus group participants mentioned they often receive invitations to sign petitions, particularly through networks, platforms, and coalitions.

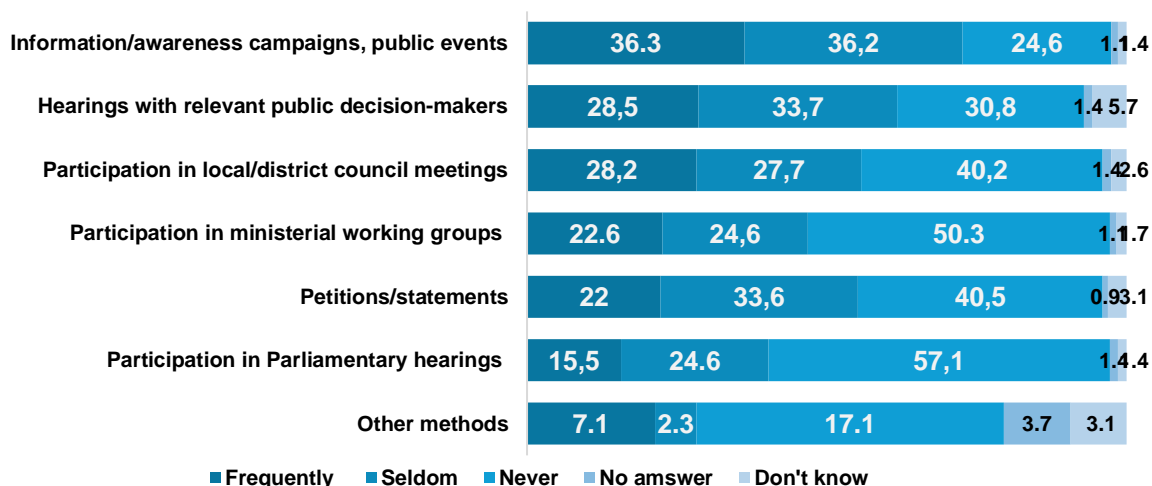


Figure __. Which of the following methods does your organization use to communicate its position on public policy? N=354, %

Other methods for CSO participation in public policies include the direct consultation of public policy documents. In the Republic of Moldova, the portal Particip.gov.md⁴⁸, which allows all stakeholders to participate in the process of elaboration of important public policy documents at different levels. The survey results showed that only 29.4% of CSOs, including more than half of the CSOs in Chisinau, are registered on this portal and 13.7% are not aware of this resource. In 2023, only 28% of CSOs had accessed Particip.gov.md to review a draft policy proposed by public authorities, and 47.4% did not use this public consultation platform.

Focus group participants who had the experience of interacting with the platform noted some shortcomings, including the practical absence of feedback from the authors of the document, the impossibility to follow the evolution of the document, etc. These findings are also confirmed by the CSO METER 2023 report: 'The platform is not informative about the whole decision-making cycle, does not always provide the necessary documents, information or amendments to proposed drafts, nor do the authorities provide public feedback on the proposals provided by CSOs'.

Some data on the level of civil society participation at national level was also provided by the State Chancellery⁴⁹. According to a report of the State Chancellery of the Republic of Moldova the degree of public consultation on draft decisions approved in 2023, various categories of stakeholders participated in the public consultation process of the central public authorities during 2023, such as: citizens (30%), civil society organizations (23%), trade unions (2%), business representatives (15%), media (0.1%), etc.

Thus, in 2023 there were 1260 recommendations submitted to various central public authorities of which 1164 were included in the summary of recommendations, 903 were accepted and in 2022 more than 2000 recommendations were registered.

In order to understand why CSOs are not inclined to participate in the public policy-making process, we need to analyze the main reasons. For example in accordance with the legislation on transparency in the decision-making process public authorities draw up lists of stakeholders in the decision-making process - citizens, associations established in accordance with the law, private legal entities, who will be affected, might be affected by the decision and who can influence the decision-making process. According to the survey results only 38.6% of the interviewed CSOs

⁴⁸ <https://particip.gov.md/ro>

⁴⁹ https://cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/raport_transparenta_decizionala_anul_2023.pdf

registered as an interested party, and 18.3% were not familiar with the existence of such a possibility.

Also, the reason for low participation in public policies is that CSOs do not believe in their power and ability to influence decisions. Only 13.1% are fully confident that they can influence decisions taken at the local level, and an even smaller number of CSOs, only 7.4%, are fully confident that they can influence decisions at the central level. However, 20.9% of CSOs rate their ability to mobilize citizens to support a particular cause very highly.

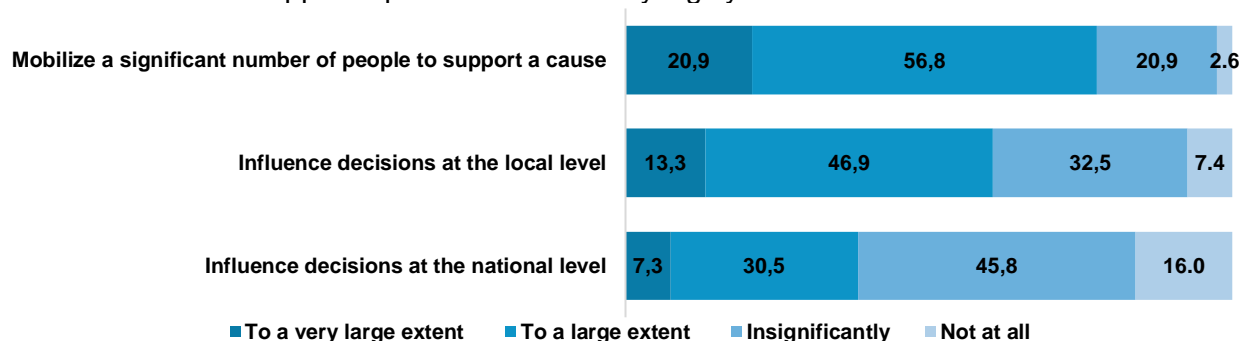


Figure __. To what extent do you think that an organization like the one represented by you can...?N=354, %

According to 47.4% of CSOs, the reasons for their low confidence in their ability to influence decisions is that authorities lack the necessary resources and potential to engage with civil society. 14.3% of CSOs consider that the reason is the low level of knowledge and capacity of CSOs themselves in the field of public policy

	%
Authorities lack sufficient resources and potential to engage with civil society	50,4
Authorities do not trust CSOs	18,7
Our CSOs do not have sufficient knowledge of the political processes	14,8
Other	15,4
Don't know	15,4
No answer	3,0

Tabel __. What are the main challenges/difficulties you face in working with public authorities? N=350, %

These conclusions are also confirmed by focus group participants, especially in the regions, who are convinced that at local level citizens have a sufficiently high level of trust in CSOs and, if certain conditions, such as openness of authorities and a higher level of knowledge and skills of CSOs for effective participation in public policy processes, are in place, the results of their participation and influence can be much more significant.

CSOs at national level emphasized the crucial role of leadership in cooperation between civil society and public authorities. They emphasize that stable leadership is not only essential, but of paramount importance, as any change can lead to a rare deterioration in the quality of the partnership.

Participants stressed the need for transparency from central government and improved and more effective communication. CSOs at the national level welcomed the National Program 2024-2027 for Civil Society Development, "but its implementation could be faster".

Another reason that significantly reduces the effectiveness of CSO participation in public policy processes is the level of participation in these processes of the citizens these CSOs represent.

All focus group participants agree that citizens' participation in public life is low, mainly due to lack of skills, knowledge and information on methods of civic engagement. In addition, some Soviet stereotypes persist when authorities do not involve citizens in decision-making. Participants also mentioned that they are working on including their beneficiaries in effective dialogs with partners

and authorities to improve services. Southern civil society organizations and national CSOs also consider that some authorities do not encourage citizen participation.

The study also analyzed the opportunities that the authorities can offer to CSOs. About a third of CSOs (29.7%) believe that public authorities could provide them with funding. In addition, 13.8% expect to receive premises and infrastructure, while 8.7% and 8.5% of the organizations expect information, education and consultancy support.

Surprisingly, only 7.2% of organizations believe that public authorities could offer them collaboration and partnerships.

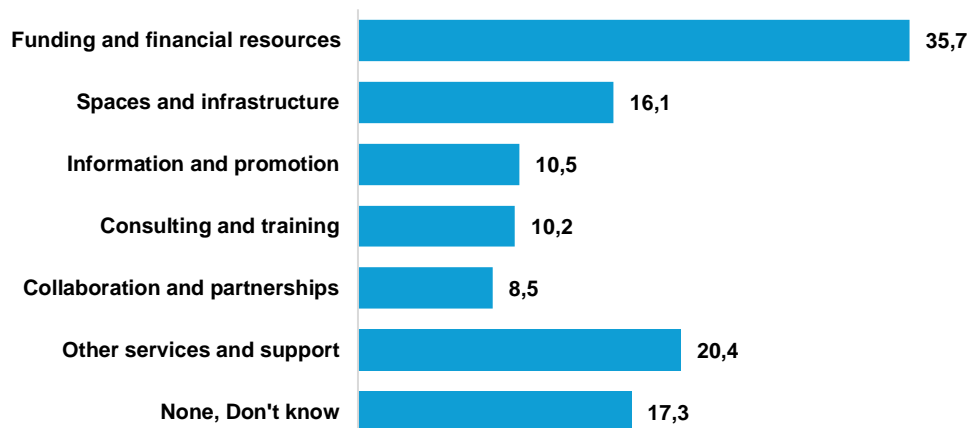


Figure __. What services do you think the authorities could offer to CSOs to facilitate their activities? N=354, %

Conclusions

Moldova's legislative framework is generally favorable for CSO involvement in public policy. However, CSOs' involvement remains moderate. The indicators obtained confirm that CSOs are not passive observers in the public policy-making process, but active participants. CSOs are involved in decision-making processes at different stages, whenever possible (consultation of public policy documents, participation in public hearings, working groups and meetings of decision-making authorities, etc.). In this context, participatory budgeting should also be mentioned, which has become a "good example" of civil society involvement. CSOs are also quite positive about their relationship with the authorities and are confident that the authorities respect their independence and value their contribution to the development of the community and the country. However, there are a number of objective factors that negatively affect the level of CSO involvement in public policies, including the fact that the authorities, while actively accepting and engaging in cooperation with CSOs in the implementation of joint projects, still ignore the role of CSOs in the decision-making process. Public authorities, especially at the local level, often lack the resources and capacity to engage effectively with CSOs. Additionally, there is a trust deficit between authorities and civil society, which hampers deeper collaboration. On the other hand, CSOs recognize that they themselves lack the necessary capacity, knowledge, skills and resources to participate fully and actively in public policies.

At the national level, despite the existence of an adequate regulatory framework, the mechanisms and tools envisaged for CSO cooperation and participation remain less effective, such as the particip.gov.md portal.

Moldova's legislative framework is generally favorable for CSO involvement in public policy. However, CSOs' involvement remains moderate. While CSOs actively participate in decision-making processes through consultations, hearings, and working groups, several factors limit their impact. Public authorities, especially at the local level, often lack the resources and capacity to engage effectively with CSOs. Additionally, there is a trust deficit between authorities and civil society, which hampers deeper collaboration.

Despite these obstacles, CSOs believe in their role in fostering democratic engagement and community development. Participatory budgeting, in particular, stands out as a successful model of civil society involvement in local public finance management.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the capacities of public authorities and CSOs on cooperation and interaction between civil society organizations, civil servants and other public sector employees.
- Strengthen collaboration between public authorities and CSOs on public policy, including through the use of CSO research on various topics of public interest.
- Providing evidence and research informed public policies
- Strengthening CSO capacities to participate in public policy
- NGOs can contribute to the development of a civic culture by organizing educational campaigns and training sessions on engaging citizens in democratic processes.
- NGOs should actively involve the local community in decision-making processes. Organizations that promote public policies should be examples of good practice in citizen involvement.
- Develop proposals on improving the regulatory framework governing the work of NGOs and improving the regulatory framework for decision-making.
- Promote participatory budgeting as an effective form of civil society involvement in the management of local public finances and the solution of community problems. Exchange of experience between local and national NGOs on the involvement and dissemination of practices on CSO involvement in the decision-making process.
- Development and implementation of NGO-LPA partnership agreements that would involve citizens in the decision-making process.

Gender Analysis

Similar to many European countries, Moldova's non-profit sector is mainly staffed by women, who also form a significant portion of the primary beneficiaries of civil society activities. It is important for us to align with European countries. However, studies show that having a higher representation of women in the non-profit sector does not necessarily improve women's situations.

According to a statistical analysis by the 2018 European Union's Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility—Regional Actions⁵⁰, two out of three people involved in Civil Society Organization activities in the Republic of Moldova are women.

The CSO Compass Study data shows similar results. Out of the total number of CSOs with employed staff, 67% have a majority of women, 21% have a majority of men, and 12% have an equal number of women and men. In one-third of CSOs, no men are on the team. Women also lead civil society organizations' administration. Thus, women manage CSOs in 55.1% of cases and men in 44.9%. Regionally, most women leaders are concentrated in Gagauzia and the South region, with 90.9% and 69.0%, respectively, and in the North, with 68.5%, while men managers are concentrated in the Chisinau municipality, with 55.6%. (See Q23 – *The manager of the organization is...*)

The 2024 EU countries study on Women CSO Leaders for Systemic Change⁵¹ concluded that the non-profit sector “is burning out women leaders at an alarming rate [...] For most of them, being a transformative leader has come at a great personal cost, including structural overwork,

⁵⁰ Statistical Analysis on the Civil Society Sector in the Republic of Moldova, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility, 2018, at <https://eapcivilsociety.eu/news/project-news/statistical-analysis-on-the-civil-society-sector-in-the-republic-of-moldova-infographics.html>

⁵¹ Women CSO Leaders for Systemic Change, Céline Charveriat, Joanna Maycock, Eloise Bodin and Angela Philp, 2024, at <https://feps-europe.eu/publication/women-cso-leaders-for-systemic-change/>

exhaustion, and poor health. While their deep sense of personal responsibility towards their mission, colleagues, and society keeps them going, they are frustrated not being empowered to bring about systemic change at scale in line with the mission of their organizations. They are constantly firefighting to keep organizations alive [...] At a time when unparalleled societal challenges require a giant reset, women leaders are not provided with the space, support, and enabling environment they need [...] While transformative feminist leadership is essential for our civil society to fulfill its potential, there is little proactive investment in supporting its development and practice.”

The study surveyed 148 women to show how much women in civil society are overworked. As a result, 64.8% of EU women leaders in civil society don't finish their weekly to-do lists. When asked if their work gets in the way of caring for themselves, 70% said yes. About 50% show signs of pre-burnout, such as trouble sleeping or losing focus. The most common sources of stress for women are the toxic work culture, constant conflict at work, the burden of care, and the financial insecurity that NGOs face, mainly because leaders are expected to provide financial support. Many respondents highlighted the lack of support or recognition for specific health issues, such as menopause, assisted reproduction, maternal and pregnancy-related health issues, endometriosis, and menstrual bleeding. Most women feel uncomfortable discussing these issues in the workplace and may hesitate to take time off, even when experiencing severe pain. On a positive note, nearly 70% of women respondents are confident that everyone, regardless of gender, has an equal opportunity to succeed in their organizations. They also believe that their organizations have sufficient anti-discrimination policies in place.

When asked about their motivations, the top responses were driven by values, the desire to enact change, and a thirst for learning. Material conditions, such as flexible hours and fair compensation for livelihood, took a back seat. Meanwhile, female leaders consistently push themselves to the limit, driven by the daunting task of effecting systemic change and a high emotional investment in their work. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate remarkable resilience, with only 20% admitting to frequently considering leaving their roles.

Regarding gender-sensitive programming, the organizations interviewed in the **CSO Compass Study** mentioned that women are the primary beneficiaries of CSOs. 42.6% of CSOs stated that women comprise more than half of their beneficiaries, while only 17.6% indicated that men represent most of their primary beneficiaries. In most cases, men comprise between 20% and 50% of participants in CSO activities. 60.1% of CSOs confirmed this.

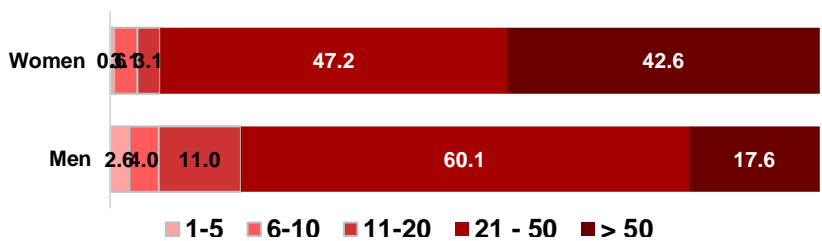


Figure __. Indicate the approximate gender proportion of your direct beneficiaries in %

Most importantly, most CSOs (72.9%) mentioned that the organization's activities consider the needs of different genders. The methods organizations use to address the needs of different genders vary. For instance, 38.4% of organizations promote equal participation and inclusion, 18.2% offer targeted programs and services, 13.2% conduct needs assessments and provide personalized support, and 8.3% implement policies and gender-sensitive practices. Interestingly, 13.2% of organizations do not take any specific actions to address gender-specific needs (See Q35&Q36 – Do the activities implemented by your organization consider the needs of different genders? How?).

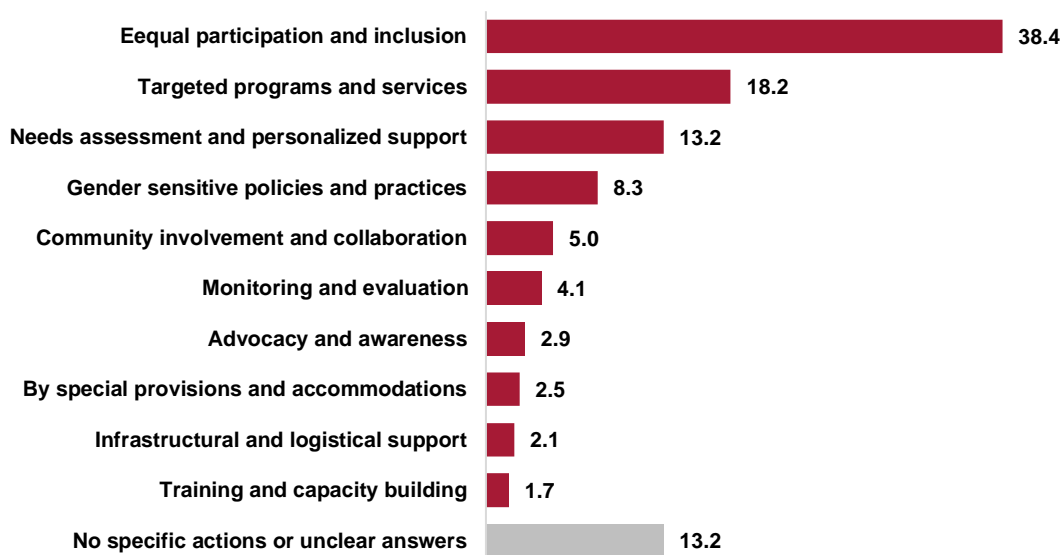


Figure __. Ways in which organizations consider the needs of different genders. N=258, %

Notably, 49.7% of the surveyed organizations reported having and utilizing a Gender Equality Policy (See Q20.10 – Gender Equality Policy). These organizations predominantly represent large entities in the municipality of Chisinau.

Another study, the 2023 Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova⁵², found that women's organizations have played a critical and pioneering role in advancing gender equality and women's rights in the refugee response. They have been at the forefront, serving as crucial partners in delivering gender-responsive services in emergencies, bringing vital local expertise, ownership, and women's perspectives. Simultaneously, the study identified a significant gap in technical skills related to gender equality programming among Moldovan CSOs, with few utilizing available gender mainstreaming tools. This points to a pressing need to address key barriers such as the lack of funding for operational costs (46%), shortage of skilled human resources (39%), and inadequate financing for institutional development (34%) to effectively deliver gender and diversity-responsive humanitarian programs. Most of these issues were also pointed out by the CSO leaders interviewed in the CSO Compass Study.

Conclusions

The data analysis shows that the non-profit sector appeals more to women than men. There are various complex reasons for this. Firstly, in Moldova, women are primarily responsible for unpaid domestic work (66% of their working time or 4.9 hours per day), also reflected in the non-profit sector, as organizations often operate without payment until they secure funding. Additionally, Moldovan women are expected to care for children, affecting their employment rates. The Women in Economics and Business 2016 Analytical Note⁵³ shows that for women of 25-49 years without children, the employment rate reaches 60%. The employment rate of women with children gradually decreases depending on the number of children: from 52.2% for women with one child to 43.9% for women with three or more children. Due to the instability of the non-profit sector, many women seek part-time or short-term roles to balance unpaid home responsibilities and paid work.

Furthermore, studies described in this chapter suggest that women are drawn to working with value-driven people and contributing to a better world rather than focusing solely on remuneration. It also indicates that women may be more inclined to work in social services than men.

⁵² Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova, Magenta Consulting for UN Women and UNHCR, 2023, at https://moldova.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/mapping_of_local_csos_in_refugee_response_in_moldova.pdf

⁵³ Women in Economics and Business Analytical Note, Georgeta Mincu, 2016, at https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/Cooperare_internationala/PNUD/10_tablouri_femei_RM/prof_4_economie.pdf

Despite women's dominance in the NGO sector, there is a need to address the imbalance in leadership positions within national organizations. These organizations offer greater capacities and opportunities compared to local ones, where male leaders are in the majority.

Recommendations

Support from International Donors

- Strengthen the capacity of Civil Society Organizations to drive systemic change, foster strong leadership, and promote feminism.
- Develop and launch gender-responsive support programs and guide CSOs in collecting, analyzing, and reporting sex-disaggregated data to ensure compliance with gender-specific needs.
- Enhance financial support for CSOs, including improved project salaries and coverage of administrative, maintenance, and equipment costs.
- Develop more leadership programs for women and facilitate knowledge exchange with other countries to implement best practices in Moldova.
- Support infrastructure projects to create child- and family-friendly spaces at work, including within civil society organizations and the communities where they operate.

Public Policies and State Support

Improve national legislation in line with recommendations of the **Gender Equality Index 2023**⁵⁴ in the following areas:

- Continuing efforts to reduce the pay gap
- Improving the legal framework for managing state budget allocations for women's programs, including non-reimbursable funding for CSOs
- Increasing the representation of women in decision-making processes at the central level
- Adapting the national legislative framework to include provisions for eliminating all forms of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Response of Civil Society to Emerging Problems

In recent decades, the world has faced a growing number of emerging problems - new, complex and unpredictable challenges that have a significant impact on society, economies and politics. These challenges can include military conflicts, epidemics, climate change, cyber threats, migration crises and changes in the geopolitical landscape. The emergence of such challenges requires a rapid response from public institutions and businesses, but the role of civil society is gaining increasing attention as a key player in shaping responses to emerging challenges. In environments where state structures may face bureaucratic and institutional constraints, it is often civil initiatives that are the first to draw attention to new challenges, mobilize resources and put pressure on authorities to make decisions.

Among such threats in recent times we can mention Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and as a consequence a large influx of refugees from Ukraine, including Moldova, the Covid pandemic, the energy crisis.

Civil society in the Republic of Moldova has shown that it is ready to respond to such challenges and in particular this is confirmed by the demonstrative mobilization of many CSOs in Moldova in response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine in February 2022, when they were among the first to meet refugees at the border and provide them with the necessary assistance. Subsequently, many CSOs were involved in various initiatives and projects aimed at supporting refugees, providing them with humanitarian, psychological and other types of assistance.

⁵⁴ Gender Equality Index 2023, Partnership for Development Center, at [CPD IEG-2023.pdf \(progen.md\)](#)

Among the CSOs surveyed, 61.9% confirmed their involvement in responding to the refugee crisis.

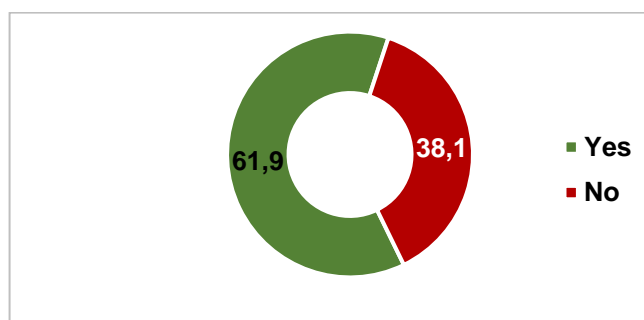


Figure __. Did your organization respond to the crisis on February 24, 2022? N=354; %

Even though there is a lack of experience in responding to such crises, 69.5% of CSOs that took an active part in responding to the refugee crisis were actively involved in providing accommodation and food assistance to refugees, especially in the first months of the war, 45% of CSOs were subsequently actively involved in providing psychological assistance to refugees and 35% are still involved in supporting refugees in their integration into society by assisting with employment and business start-up.

The survey data also shows that the experience of past and current crises has significantly increased the readiness of CSOs to respond to emerging crises. Thus, 68.1% of CSOs indicated that they are ready to mobilize the community in case of crisis situations, and 81% of CSOs confirmed their readiness to carry out community awareness activities in such situations. In addition, it should also be noted the indispensable experience of CSOs in cooperating with the various actors involved in responding to these crises, and in particular with the authorities and international structures.

However, it should be noted that in order to effectively respond to such crises, CSOs need the necessary resources, both financial and human, as well as the strengthening of their capacities. The Mapping of Local CSOs in Refugee Response in Moldova study indicated significant problems in funding CSOs' response to the refugee crisis, as well as low capacity and knowledge of CSOs in the field of crisis response. Thus, focus group participants, those who were involved in initiatives aimed at supporting refugees, confirmed that at the beginning of the crisis they had to act intuitively, without coordination and a clear plan of action. In addition, they noted the fact that there are practically no specialized CSOs in Moldova that could be consulted or supported. Sometime after the outbreak of the war, missions of international organizations that had the experience and capacity to respond to such challenges began to arrive in Moldova and provided CSOs from Moldova with the necessary financial, advisory and technical support.

Problems with funding and lack of trained personnel to respond to crises were also confirmed by the study participants. Also, a small number of CSOs pointed out problems of interaction with authorities and international partners in coordinating refugee assistance.

Only 39.7% of CSOs that participated in refugee crisis response received funding, while 60.3% of CSOs carried out these activities from their own resources and on a voluntary basis.

Conclusions

Moldovan civil society demonstrates significant potential in responding to emerging problems, first of all acting as an important mediator between the state and society in solving crisis situations. In addition, CSOs are often the first to respond to challenges, providing necessary assistance and support to victims.

Despite being active and willing to engage in crisis situations, CSOs face a lack of financial and institutional resources and capacity to implement their initiatives. They are often dependent on external funding or international donors, which makes them quite vulnerable and the impact of their involvement less tangible. There is also a lack of interaction between CSOs and local governments in responding to emerging crises.

Recommendations:

Strengthen the interaction between the state and civil society. To be more effective in responding to emerging problems, more institutionalized platforms for dialogue and cooperation are needed. This could include the establishment of civil protection structures with active participation of CSOs, as well as CSO participation in the development of public policy in crisis response at both local and national levels.

Increasing the financial capacity of CSOs. Mechanisms should be developed to support CSOs at the national level, such as government grants or tax incentives for companies and individuals supporting CSO initiatives to address crisis situations. This would reduce the organizations' dependence on international funding and increase their sustainability.

Develop CSO capacity to address emerging problems through organizing and conducting training and capacity building programs.

Strengthening solidarity networks and coalitions. Civil society organizations are encouraged to form coalitions for joint problem-solving and resource sharing not only during times of crisis, but also in times of calm to prevent the emergence of possible crises or reduce the impact of impending crises. In conditions of limited resources, this will increase the effectiveness of actions and increase pressure on the authorities to take necessary measures.

ANNEXES