



CSO Compass: Unfolding Moldovan Civil Society Organizations Landscape Key Insights

People in Need Moldova
March 2025

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I. INTRODUCTION

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Moldova draw a lot of attention and interest from national and international community. Its diverse nature requires a better understanding to untangle its complexities and facilitate a more straightforward approach for supporting its development, growth and transformational impact. The CSO Compass initiative was launched by People in Need (PIN) in 2023 under European Union and PIN funding to map, analyze and highlight the CSOs current situation, the key challenges and the opportunities in a critical period of transition from relatively large to more scarce humanitarian funding due to the Ukrainian Refugee Response boom and its downscaling. Since then, the CSOs path has further been disrupted by the reforms associated to the Republic of Moldova's new European orientation in which civil society is expected to play a key role and, more recently, by the US suspension of funding.

To achieve a comprehensive representation of Moldovan civil society landscape, this initiative employs a robust methodological approach combining different components that observe and analyze civil society from multiple perspectives and lenses. In addition, results and conclusions were enriched by PIN's expertise of over 21 years of financial support and capacity building provided to diverse civil society actors including over 216 formalized civil society organizations.

As a result of this process, the CSO Compass initiative has so far developed the following five self-contained products that can be accessed by all in English, Romanian and Russian:

1. The **CSO Map** was conceived and built with the support of Trimetrica. This live and interactive online tool aims to facilitate identification, presentation and coordination between CSO, public authorities and the international community.
2. The **CSO Study** developed in partnership with Contact Center and with data collected by iData—Date Inteligente. The final objective of this study is to comprehensively assess and understand the capacities, needs, and resilience of Moldovan CSOs, facilitating an evidence-based approach to guide future interventions and support.
3. The **CSO Capacity Building Plan** which summarizes the results of the discussions with local organizations as actors of their own development and seeks to orientate actors that want to contribute to the development of Moldovan civil society to focus their attention on what CSOs are requesting in term of capacity building.
4. The **CSO Initiatives** assessment follows-up on previous analysis from PIN on those emerging CSO initiatives, many of them grassroots organizations, that also play a key role in shaping the landscape.
5. This document, the **Moldova CSO Compass: Key Insights** that acts as an overarching guide to summarize the key finding of this process and provide insightful recommendations to the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the international donors and the CSO community to continue to boost its active role as drivers of change.

In terms of geographical reach, the CSO Compass covers all regions of Moldova, from Chisinau to smaller, often underrepresented areas, including Gagauzia and the southern regions. This geographic diversity highlights not only regional challenges but also the unique strengths and needs of CSOs across the country. Beyond the current state and challenges, the CSO Compass sets new landmarks based on the collected information for the future of Moldovan Civil Society development.

II. METHODOLOGY

To achieve these goals, the initiative employs a **robust methodological approach** that combines secondary data analysis (including a desk review of indices, governmental databases and reports, and institutional and research publications from government bodies, national CSOs, and international organizations) with primary data collection through surveys (CAWI, CATI) and participatory discussion methods, such as focus group discussions (FGDs) and roundtable discussions conducted across Moldova.

A. Data Collection Methods and Sources

The diverse palette of methods applied in the CSO Compass initiative, which are described in detail below, ensured broad representation of Moldova's varied CSO landscape and strengthened data triangulation.

Desk Review: The desk review analyzed key reports and documents from international organizations, national CSOs, and government institutions to contextualize the primary data and address the study's main research questions. These resources include the CSO Sustainability Index, CSO Meter, the database of the Public Services Agency (ASP – *Agenția Servicii Publice*), financial reports from the National Bureau of Statistics, and data on CSOs' 2023 tax filings (ONG17 form) from the State Tax Service. Additional references include reports from the State Chancellery, national CSOs (e.g., CRJM, CONTACT), and past analyses of CSO development in Moldova conducted by UNDP (2006), IDIS Viitorul (2015), and the EU (2017). The results and conclusions were further enriched by PIN's expertise and lessons learned from over 21 years of supporting diverse civil society actors in Moldova.

CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview): Two questionnaires were used for primary data collection – one for mapping (an ongoing process since April 2024) and one for the study component (with data collected between May and July 2024). The questionnaires were disseminated to CSOs for self-completion using online tools. After receiving the completed responses, the data was reviewed for accuracy and validity.

CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview): These interviews were conducted via phone and recorded on mobile phones, tablets, and computers, using SurveyToGo and ArcGIS Survey123 mobile survey applications. The data collection period was aligned with that of the CAWI surveys. This method compensated for some limitations of the CAWI approach, such as reduced accuracy in online responses and lower survey participation.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Five FGDs, corresponding to five geographical areas (northern, central, and southern regions, Chisinau, and UTA Gagauzia), were held in June and July 2024. These discussions provided qualitative insights and ensured the inclusion of voices from CSOs representing urban, regional, and national-level actors.

Roundtable Discussions: To facilitate in-depth discussions and explore opinions, experiences, and perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and developmental needs of CSOs, fifteen roundtable sessions were conducted in Chisinau, Comrat, Cahul, and Balti between August and September 2024.

Together, these diverse data collection methods provided a robust evidence base, enriching the CSO Compass findings with both quantitative and qualitative insights, while capturing the perspectives of CSOs from across Moldova.

B. The Population and Sampling

The CSO Compass has broad geographical coverage, spanning all regions of Moldova – from the capital city, Chisinau, to smaller, often underrepresented areas, including UTA Gagauzia and the southern regions. This diversity enables the identification of both regional challenges and the unique strengths and needs of locally active civil society organizations (CSOs).

For the CSO study component, a stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representativeness across Moldova's regions (northern, central, southern, Chisinau, and UTA Gagauzia). The total population of active CSOs was divided into strata based on these regions, with each stratum reflecting the same proportional structure as the overall CSO population. According to the Bureau of Statistics, 2764 CSOs submitted financial statements for 2022, and this formed the population from which the sample was drawn.

To achieve statistical validity, the sample size was calculated to ensure a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This calculation, along with adjustments to account for underrepresented geographic units, resulted in a final sample of 350 CSOs, providing a robust basis for analysis.

In contrast, the mapping component did not use sampling. Instead, it aimed to gather and structure information on the entire population of active CSOs in Moldova. This comprehensive exercise is ongoing (March 2025), and as of now, 720 CSOs from all regions have completed and submitted information about their profiles, contributing to the larger goal of mapping Moldova's civil society landscape.

III. SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

While several studies have provided valuable insights into Moldova's civil society, the **CSO Compass** addresses unique and critical gaps in understanding the sector. These studies, such as the **CSO Sustainability Index**, **CSO Meter**, **Eastern Partnership Index**, and the **Public Opinion Barometer**, have focused on assessing Moldova's CSO environment, often highlighting factors like financial sustainability, legislative challenges, and public image. However, these studies typically capture data at a high level, without the nuanced, perspective that reflects local CSOs' experiences and needs in real-time, particularly as they navigate a shifting funding landscape and Moldova's EU accession reforms.

Building on prior analyses of Moldova's civil society, the CSO Map serves as the first component of the CSO Compass. Up to this date, over 720 CSOs have registered through a self-assessment questionnaire, **creating an interactive 'CSO Passport'** that details essential information such as the organization's name, sector of engagement, target groups, geographical coverage, contact points, and funding sources (including which donors). This live online tool not only facilitates the identification, presentation, and coordination among CSOs, public authorities, and the international community but also complements the broader CSO Compass study by offering a real-time, nuanced snapshot of Moldova's dynamic civil society landscape. The map, as a live tool, will be updated on a regular basis.

The CSO Compass, therefore, brings an added value by centering on the **perspectives of CSOs themselves** and complementing it with PIN experience in funding, supporting and collaborating, offering an in-depth look at both their strengths and their challenges. By emphasizing direct input from these organizations, this massive exercise brings light on the sector's operational landscape from the ground up, revealing the resilience and adaptability of Moldovan CSOs in response to emerging crises, like the Ukrainian refugee crisis. With over 61.9% of Moldovan CSOs actively contributing to relief efforts, despite only 39.7% receiving sufficient funding, the study underscores the pivotal role CSOs play in addressing urgent needs with limited resources. This resilience demonstrates the sector's commitment to community service, even in a resource-constrained environment.

At the same time, the study reveals critical challenges, particularly regarding financial sustainability, with 61.6% of CSOs reliant on foreign funding – a dependence that is disproportionately impactful on rural organizations with limited access to resources and training opportunities. Recognizing these disparities, the study underscores the need for equitable, flexible funding models that would enable CSOs to diversify income sources, develop regional capacities, and build resilience against fluctuating funding flows.

To strengthen CSOs' impact, the study advocates for **equitable partnerships** with donors (we refer here to donors as those who give institutional funds to CSOs as a broad term inclusive of INGOs, UN Agencies, bilateral cooperation, private foundations, etc.). Such partnerships emphasize joint decision-making, resources sharing and mutual accountability, where local CSOs can set priorities that reflect the unique needs of their communities. This 'smart trust' approach fosters collaboration, ensuring that all stakeholders share credit and visibility, which bolsters trust and long-term impact.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of **flexible funding models** that provide multi-year grants and allow CSOs to align funding with local practices, reducing dependency on short-term aid. By promoting mentoring, peer learning, and comprehensive capacity-building programs, the study envisions a development model that strengthens the entire ecosystem, rather than isolated organizations. Enhancing existing **platforms for collaboration and**

information-sharing among CSOs could further enhance advocacy efforts, particularly in rural areas, by fostering joint learning, shared investment, and collaborative problem analysis.

In addition, CSOs could benefit from **robust internal strategies** that emphasize clear vision alignment, strong governance, and technology integration. Investing in strategic planning and leadership development ensures that CSOs operate with cohesion and efficiency, while targeted capacity-building initiatives enhance staff expertise. Incorporating digital tools further streamlines operations and improves transparency, thereby complementing external support mechanisms and fostering sustainable, community-centered impact.

In conclusion, the CSO Compass initiative not only offers a comprehensive view of Moldova's civil society from the organizations' own perspectives but also provides actionable recommendations to enhance their sustainability and impact. This approach aims to equip local civil society to not only survive but thrive as essential actors in Moldova's socio-political transformation.

IV. DRAWING CIVIL SOCIETY BOUNDARIES

C. Civil society organisations: conceptual boundaries

As a concept, civil society is frequently confused with non-commercial, not for profit or non-profit, and while it may contain some of its features, its diversity and complexities exceed many categorical classifications. Civil society actions can include the sale of goods or services, their actions could aim to create benefits and preferences for its individual members and in some cases aim to create a positive accounting balance to use for their foundational purpose and objective. So, what is exactly what civil society entails? In order to untangle this, let us review some definitions.

<p><i>European Union definition of CSOs</i> “Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities. A civil society organisation is an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens.”</p>	<p><i>OECD definition of CSOs: “non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. They cover a wide range of organisations that include membership-based CSOs, cause-based CSOs and service-oriented CSOs. Examples include community-based organisations and village associations, environmental groups, women’s rights groups, farmers’ associations, faith-based organisations, labour unions, co-operatives, professional associations, chambers of commerce, independent research institutes, and the not-for-profit media.”</i></p>
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From the EU and OECD civil society and civil society organizations definitions many common and complementary elements can be analyzed, but there is an unclear element regarding the social action referred to in the EU definition. The United Kingdom's Office of Civil Society defines it as: **“Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is (i) carried out by individuals or groups of people working together, (ii) not mandated and not for profit, (iii) done for the good of others – individuals, communities and/or society, and (iv) bringing about social change and or value.”** This social action definition matches OECD's part on when “people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain”.

The above definition allows us to draw the lines and boundaries of what civil society entails. The first line is that civil society cannot be connected, managed or controlled by any form of public authority or power, its actions cannot be commissioned. In addition, considering that civil society work is about social action, then the second line is that civil society necessarily involves more than one individual, it's a collective. The third line refers to civil society not seeking individual profit or, as the OECD frames it, being a non-market organisation. The fourth line details the purpose of CSOs to seek the common good or to provide public goods and services. The fifth and sixth lines come exclusively from the EU definition which adds two additional elements regarding their democratic governance and a role of mediation between the public authorities and the citizens.

Based on the discussion above, here are the key criteria that define an organization as part of the civil society ecosystem:

1. **A collective of individuals**
2. **Not controlled or managed by the state or other forms of power**
3. **Not seeking individual profit**
4. **With a purpose of common good or public service**
5. **Governed democratically**
6. **Having a role of intermediation between the public authorities and the people**

The above conditions come with an inherent contradiction of civil society: it cannot be connected, managed or controlled by any form of public authority or powers, but at the same time it seeks the same objective for which those public authorities and powers are established in the first place (common good or public service). This contradiction becomes a frequent source of tensions and misunderstanding between the public sector and the civil society space, in which both need to understand how to collaborate productively regarding this role of intermediation between the authorities and the people.

For the unique specificities of civil society and considering that its organized forms are non-market and non-state, **the civil society space is often referred to as a third sector.**

D. Drawing the line between non-commercial and CSOs in Moldova

Applying the above conceptual boundaries in practice to determine whether an established organisation is a civil society organisation or another form of non-market or non-commercial organisation is more easily said than done. In order to do so for Moldovan organization, the starting point is understanding the different type of non-commercial organisations registered in the State Registry of Legal Entities of the Republic of Moldova. In Moldova, there are 11 different legal forms that a non-commercial organisation can take. The following table presents the legal definitions of these diverse legal forms of non-commercial organizations. Annex 1 presents more details on their scope, the laws governing these forms of organization as well as their benefits, limitations and examples of common forms.

Juridical Form	Legal definition based on Moldovan legislation
Public Association	A public association is a non-commercial organization set up voluntarily by its founders in order to achieve the non-commercial purposes for which it was established.
Employers' Association	The employer is the legal entity or natural person, registered in the established manner, which manages and utilizes capital, irrespective of its form, and uses wage labor for the purpose of competitive profit. Employers' organizations are non-commercial, non-governmental, independent and apolitical organizations established on the basis of free association and equal rights for employers in various fields of activity.
Religious cult and component part	Religious denominations and their component parts are legal persons. As legal persons, religious denominations and their component parts shall be equal in rights and obligations and subject to the rules of the Civil Code. The relationships under canon law between religious cults and religious communities may neither replace nor vitiate the relationships under civil law between registered legal persons.
Foundation	A foundation is a non-commercial organization, without members, established by one or more persons, endowed with assets separate and distinct from those of the founders, intended to achieve the non-commercial purposes set out in the instrument of constitution.

Private Institution	A private institution is a non-commercial organization established by a single person for non-commercial purposes and financed in whole or in part by that person.
Public Institution	A public institution is a legal person governed by public law which is established based on an act issued by the public authority, and which is financed, in whole or in part, from the budget of the public authority.
Party and other social-political organization	Political parties are voluntary associations, with the status of a legal person, of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova with the right to vote, which, through joint activities and based on the principle of free participation, contribute to the conception, expression and realization of their political will.
Periodical Publication	Periodical publications and press agencies, which operate under conditions of political pluralism, and to respect for the legislation on copyright are a mechanism on which the State guarantees to all persons the right to free expression of opinions and ideas, to truthful information on domestic and international events.
Trade Union	Trade unions are established on a voluntary basis, for common interests (profession, branch, etc.), and are usually active in enterprises, institutions and organizations, irrespective of the legal form of organization and type of ownership, departmental or branch affiliation. The trade union represents and defends the collective and individual professional, economic, labor and social rights and interests of its members in public authorities at all levels, in the courts of law, in public associations, before employers and their associations.
Union of legal persons	A union of legal persons is a non-commercial organisation that assembles legal persons that are acting for profit, representing several legal persons joining their efforts for the purpose of coordinating their activities, representing and defending their common interests.
Other non-commercial organization	The other non-commercial organizations are a legal person, non-profit, apolitical, which is established, under the conditions of the law, by its members, to jointly carry out development projects of local or regional interest, as well as to jointly provide/to provide public services etc. They are oriented towards a particular group for which it promotes its interests and rights.

Based on the above juridical forms of non-commercial organisation and the previous boundaries for defining CSOs, a first identification and categorization to identify CSOs can be done. While most of the non-commercial organisation are identified as mainly structured as a CSO, some exclusions apply. Public institutions for being controlled or managed by the state; private institutions since their establishment includes a single individual; party and political organizations because while being civil society movements, over time they can or become part of the state or be controlled by other forms of power. The union of legal persons and other non-commercial organisation have many different forms and while they're mainly forms of civil society organisations, a few exclusions apply. This broad classification is not categorical, as true expression of civil society action can only be assessed when ensuring the 6 boundaries presented above are met, which usually requires deeper knowledge and understanding on each organisations purpose, governance, actions and usage of its financial resources.

Non-commercial Juridical Form RO Non-commercial Juridical Form ENG	Common type of non-commercial organisations under each legal form in Moldova	Form of CSO	Included in CSO Compass
Asociația Obștească Public Association	Associations of parents and teachers, farmers, local residents, animal protection. Unions of workers and professionals. Cultural societies, sports clubs. Development NGOs.	Yes	Yes
Asociația Patronală Employers' Association	Associations of producers, processors, growers, entrepreneurs, importers, transporters, etc. and chambers of commerce	Mainly Yes	Yes

Cult religios și parte componentă Religious cult and component part	Religious cult, religious community and religious institution	Yes	No
Fundația Foundation	Cultural, religious and charity oriented, private sector foundations, international, development promotion org.	Yes	Yes
Instituția Privată Private Institution	<u>Education</u> : Academies, institutes, schools, colleges, universities <u>Social and cultural</u> : periodicals, cultural centers, theaters, clubs	Mainly No	No
Instituția Publică Public Institution	<u>Education</u> : Academies, schools, colleges, universities <u>Social and cultural</u> : community centers, cultural centers	No	No
Partid și altă organizație social-politică Party and other social-political organiz.	Political parties and political movements	Yes and No	No
Publicația Periodică Periodical Publication	Newsletter, gazette, magazine, periodical, newspaper	Yes	Yes
Sindicatul Trade Union	Trade union centre, trade union organization, trade union federation	Yes	Yes
Uniunea de persoane juridice Union of legal persons	Associations of producers, processors, growers, entrepreneurs, importers, transporters, etc. and chambers of commerce	Mainly Yes	Yes
Altă organizație necomercială Other non-commercial organisation	Association of water users, association of condominium owners, sectoral committees for vocational training, INGOs, intercommunity development association, local action groups.	Mainly Yes	Yes

For the CSO Compass initiative purposes, the table above presents those juridical forms that are included and those that have been excluded based on the preliminary categorization. In addition, the religious cult and component part organisations have been excluded from the analysis. Overall, it becomes clear that in Moldova **not all non-commercial organizations can be considered as civil-society organizations.**

E. Civil society space: the third sector's purpose and field of activities

Civil society organizations are very diverse, which makes it difficult to analyse and understand the extent of the civil society space. The CSO Compass analysis focused on better understanding **the purpose, the sectors of activities, the activities, the target groups, their geographical coverage and their size or capacities.**

The confusion related to the purpose of CSOs starts with the fact that there is no common definition and agreement between all members of society of what is the 'common good'. For this reason, **the purpose of a CSO** needs to be clearly defined by the collective of individuals behind founding and maintaining it (its constituency). The juridical form and common type of CSOs falls short in understanding their main purposes. The approximation used in CSO Compass is to align the purpose of CSOs to the Sustainable Development Goals that they seek to contribute to (see section IV.B).

Regarding **the sectors of activities**, these have been aligned to the common categorization from the public and private spheres that the civil society sphere aims to influence. The CSO Map used an adaptation of the United Nations’ Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 5 (ISIC Rev.5) that would ensure an exhaustive list of categories of activities and its public/private sector matching.

These broad categories, however, while giving an orientation on what sectors the CSOs cover, do not provide insights on **what actual activities the CSOs do**. From an academic perspective, many researchers have over time aimed to create typologies to categorize civil society actions. Riboldi (2024) presents a good overview of academic and grey literature of CSO activities and proposes the categorization presented in the table below.

Type	Activity	Description
The “Big Three”	Advocate systematically	Public/private activities aimed at directly shifting or influencing public policy
	Build capacity	Coordinating and running training, leadership development and education activities
	Deliver service	Providing free service delivery or material goods, including charity
“Business as usual”	Manage organisation	Various activities to keep functioning, including self-governance, measurement and evaluation
	Engage community	Coordination, training or activating volunteer labour relating to other CSO activities
	Work collaboratively	Working with other CSOs through formal and informal networks, alliances, coalitions, etc.
Enabling	Hold space	Providing spaces where other can meet and conduct activities, whether virtual or in person
	Provide funding	Coordinating, managing and distributing funding to community groups and other CSOs
	Coordinate network	Facilitating/convening groups of CSOs working together, e.g. facilitator, peak, intermediary, etc.
	Conduct research	Formal or informal research, for policy development, evaluation and advocacy, etc.

Source: Riboldi, M. (2024). A typology of civil society organisation activities: a multi-grounded theory approach to what CSOs do. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 59(2), 197–215.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2024.2362211>

The above categories, while helping clarify the extent of the civil society space, are not commonly accepted and may create confusion if asked directly. For this reason, these categories have rather been used in the CSO Compass as analytical topics (e.g., advocacy, partnerships, capacity building) and not to try to categorize organisations. Finally, regarding the **target groups** and **geographical footprint**, the CSO Map presented below allows us to quickly understand the long list of target groups each organisation focuses on, as well as their self-reported geographical coverage.

Furthermore, when including a **size or capacities dimension** combining financial, historical and geographical aspects of the organization, Civil Society Organizations can further be classified based into the following categories:

- **Well-established CSOs**, typically located in capitals or major urban centres, have a clear mandate and extensive networks.
- **Mid-sized CSOs** operate in both urban centres and regions, with diversified, donor-dependent activities.
- **Small formalized CSOs** are region-based, often founded by a single individual or family, donor-driven with limited funding, and generally have few paid employees.

- **New or emerging CSOs**, created or re-activated in recent years, showcase innovative approaches and youthful membership.
- **Grassroots organizations and civic initiatives** are informal, may focus on a single issue, and often function on an ad-hoc basis with a small group of supporters.
- **Social and cultural movements** are loosely structured, non-formalized, and operate on a horizontal, direct-democracy model, engaging citizens directly without reliance on donor funding, though they may lack lasting organizational structures.

While trying to univocally categorize CSOs is unrealistic, it makes sense to advance in better understanding the purpose to which they want to contribute, the sectors of activity they influence, the activities they usually conduct, the groups that they target, their geographical footprint and, finally, their overall financial and operational capacities.

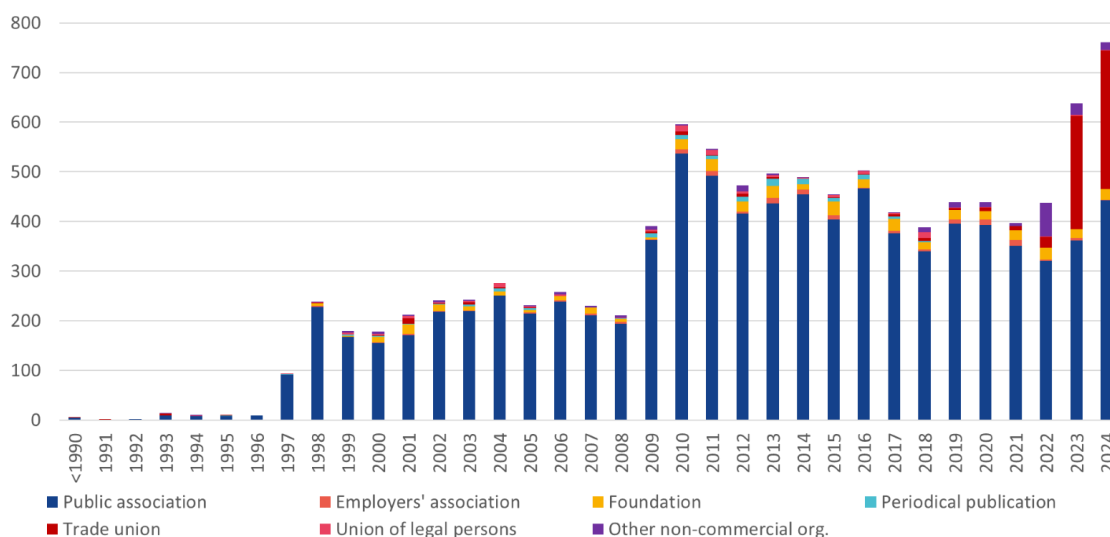
V. DISCOVERING CSO DIVERSITY

F. Moldovan CSOs registration and activity patterns

The State Registry of legal entities on non-commercial organizations allows to observe the dynamic of creation of local CSOs. Three periods can be clearly identified. The first includes CSOs created even before 1990 until 1996 in which an average of less than 8 CSOs were created per year. The second, from 1997 to 2008, in which around 216 CSOs were created every year. The third, since 2009, in which 492 organizations have registered each year. Altogether, until the end of 2024, 10,413 CSOs have been registered in Moldova with 85.3% public associations, 5.7% trade unions, 3.8% foundations, 2.0% other non-commercial organisations and employers' associations, periodical publications and union of legal persons representing 1% each.

Some patterns of registration are worth highlighting. Public associations represent until 2021 around 90% of the CSOs registered. In 2022, a peak of 28 international organisations arriving to Moldova in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and a large registration of local action groups account for the atypical peak of other non-commercial organisations. More recently in 2023 and 2024 the number of registered trade unions have sky-rocketed, and this atypical pattern deserves some attention and further understanding what is driving this growth. Since 2010, the creation of foundations has been quite stable with an average of 20 new foundations created per year. The creation of union of legal persons is more volatile ranging from 0 to 12 being created since 2010 and a clear decrease in the last years. A similar pattern with less volatility is observed for the employer's associations that on average add 6.6 CSOs per year since 2010. Regarding periodical publications, since 2019 no new periodical publications have been created due to a legislative change.

Dynamic of creation of civil society organisations in the Republic of Moldova, 1990 to 2024



Source: State Register of legal entities on non-commercial organizations registered in the Republic of Moldova (as of 30.12.2024)

The dynamic of liquidation of CSOs is associated to its dynamic of creation. The State Registry only contains 538 CSOs being formally liquidated out of which 92% are public associations, 3% foundations, 1.5% periodical publications, 1.3% trade unions and the rest forms of CSO represent less than 1%. Very few CSOs are liquidated in the same year or first two years since its creation, most are liquidated from the third up until their 21 years of creation. In 2019, 85 CSOs were liquidated in a peak only surpassed in 2024 with 98 CSOs liquidated. In that period, an average of 65 CSOs have been liquidated, which is significantly lower than the creation of new CSOs over that period.

As a result, an apparent cumulation of CSOs is created over time, but its dynamic creates some concern on how many are really active and contributing to the common good. To approach this problematic, the CSO Compass initiative inquired on the list of non-commercial organizations that presented their 2022 annual financial declaration to the state. A total of 3500 non-commercial organizations out of which 2709 CSOs presented their 2022 financial reporting are considered as “active” despite acknowledging that many may have presented their financial situation with zero financial movements in 2022. In addition, considering that in both the CSO Map and CSO Study around a third of the participants did not present their financial statements and that the 1399 newly created CSOs in 2023 and 2024 should remain active, **the Moldovan landscape can be dimensioned at around 5100 active civil society organisations.**

This landscape is rapidly growing, since at the current pace **2 CSOs are created every day in Moldova while 1 is officially liquidated every 4 days.** Comes the question of overlap, real capacities, efficiency and overall financial sustainability. The CSO Map presented in the following section is a tool that aims to facilitate this type of analysis.

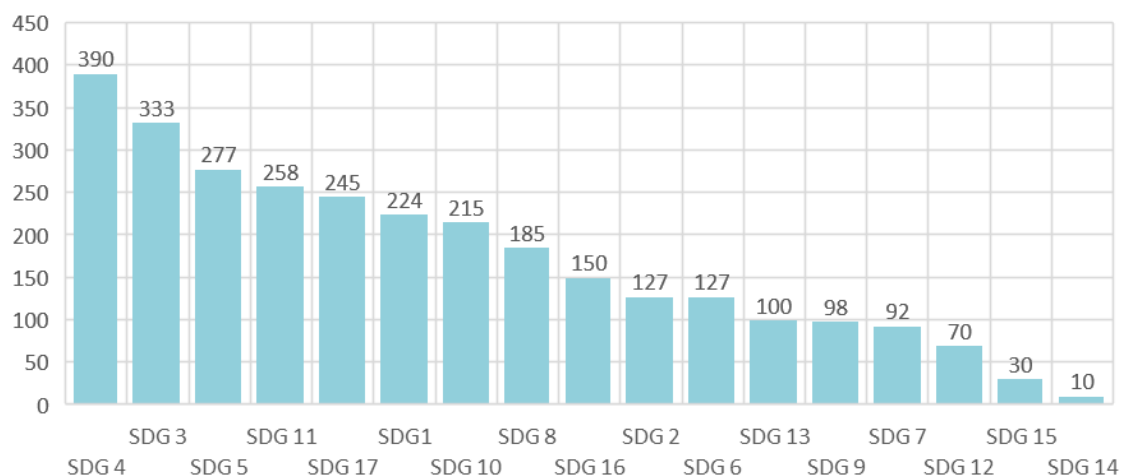
G. CSO Map: overview of Moldova's civil society focuses and capacities

Over 720 CSOs have participated in the CSO Compass mapping exercise until the publication of this document, and the registration form is open for many more to join. With around 12% of the active CSOs having participated, the CSO Map is currently the most representative cartography of civil society in Moldova. This section analyses the responses of participant organisations until March 2025.

According to the preliminary results of the CSO Map, Moldova’s CSOs efforts advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or purposes are focused on **Quality Education (SDG 4), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), and Gender Equality (SDG 5)**. Among the 700 registered CSOs, **390 organizations** are actively contributing to **SDG 4**, underscoring the sector’s strong commitment to improving educational outcomes through non-formal education, capacity-building, and community engagement. Additionally, **333 organizations** focus on **SDG 3**, reflecting significant efforts to enhance healthcare access, mental health services, and community health initiatives. **Gender Equality (SDG 5)** is another key area, with **277 organizations** advocating for women's empowerment, inclusive policies, and equal opportunities across various sectors.

However, certain SDGs receive comparatively less attention, highlighting gaps that may require additional resources and strategic interventions. Those are SDGs related to conservation, such as **Life Below Water (SDG 14)** with only **10 CSOs** actively working in this field and **Life on Land (SDG 15)**, focused on biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use, engages just **30 CSOs**. **Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12)**, which promotes sustainable resource use and waste management, is another underrepresented area, with **70 organizations** working towards its objectives. These disparities indicate the need for more targeted support and investment in environmental and sustainability-focused initiatives within Moldova’s CSO ecosystem.

CSO Engagement Across Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Moldova

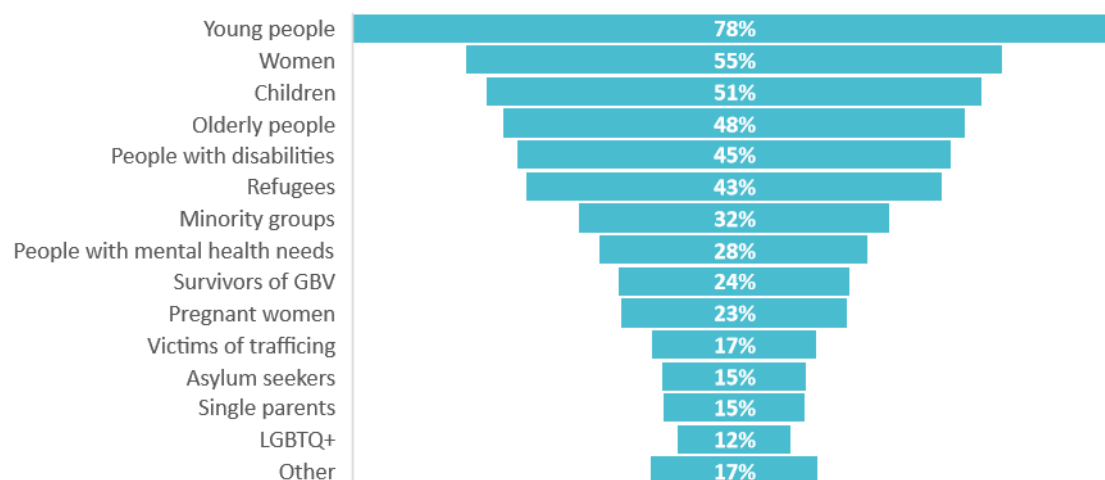


Source: People in Need, CSO Compass – Map registration survey

Regarding the sectors of activity of the CSOs, **the most frequent one is community development with over 55% of organizations working in the field, the second most frequent is social services and support and education, both indicated by 49% CSOs.** Other main sectors of activity include civil society development (43%), civic engagement and promotion of volunteering (42%), human rights (41%) and to a lesser extent environment protection (28%), entrepreneurship support and economic development as well as and arts, culture and heritage reported by quarter of CSOs. While the association with professional categories is more limited, a significant number focus on public administration, public utilities and, in general, there are CSOs interact with almost all sectors of activities (manufacturing, wholesale, financial and insurance, telecommunications, etc.) except for mining and quarrying, and real estate.

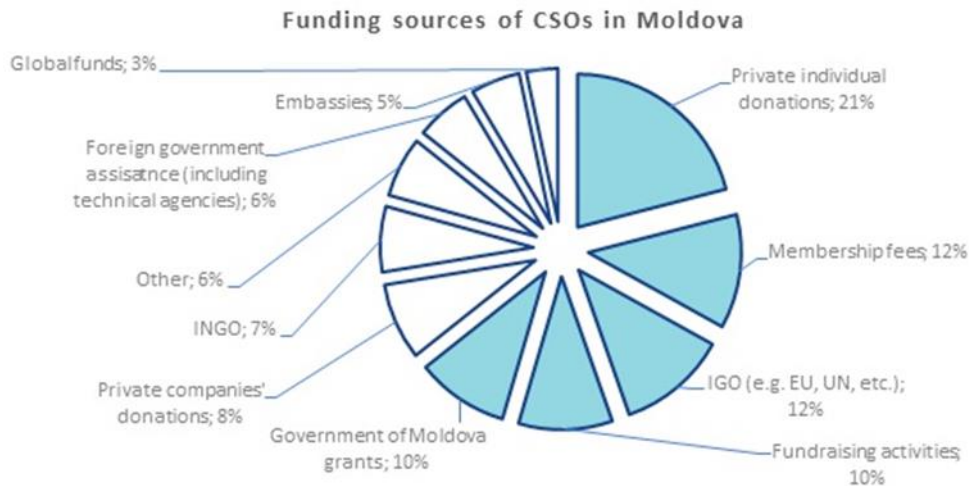
From the target group perspective, the support provided by CSOs in Moldova primarily includes different age groups, such as young people, children, and elderly people; women, with a focus on gender equality, economic, social, and political empowerment, access to education and knowledge, legal support and rights, and assistance to marginalized women; people with disabilities; and various minority groups, including the refugee population, particularly following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Main target groups of CSOs in Moldova



Source: People in Need, CSO Compass – Map registration survey

An analysis of funding sources for CSOs in Moldova reveals that the three most frequently identified sources are private individual donations, membership fees, and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs, such as EU and UN funds). Private donations, in particular, highlight strong grassroots and civic engagement. Additional funding sources include government grants (10%), private company donations (8%), and organized fundraising activities (10%), while international actors, including INGOs, embassies, and global funds, also play a supporting role in developing and sustaining the COS sector in Moldova. Despite this diversity, many CSOs, aside from trade unions and other membership-based organizations, are still generally expected to rely heavily on funding from international donors.



Source: People in Need, CSO Compass – Map registration survey

In Moldova, the most common partnerships and collaborations between CSOs and government ministries are with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of Culture. These partnerships highlight the important role of CSOs in supporting governmental priorities, particularly in addressing community needs and implementing specialized programs. At the local level, CSOs frequently collaborate with mayor's offices, town halls, local councils, and social assistance departments, often working together in various combinations. Additionally, many Moldovan CSOs rely on international expertise, funding, and technical support to strengthen their capacity and expand their reach.

VI. NAVIGATING CHALLENGES WITH RESILIENCE

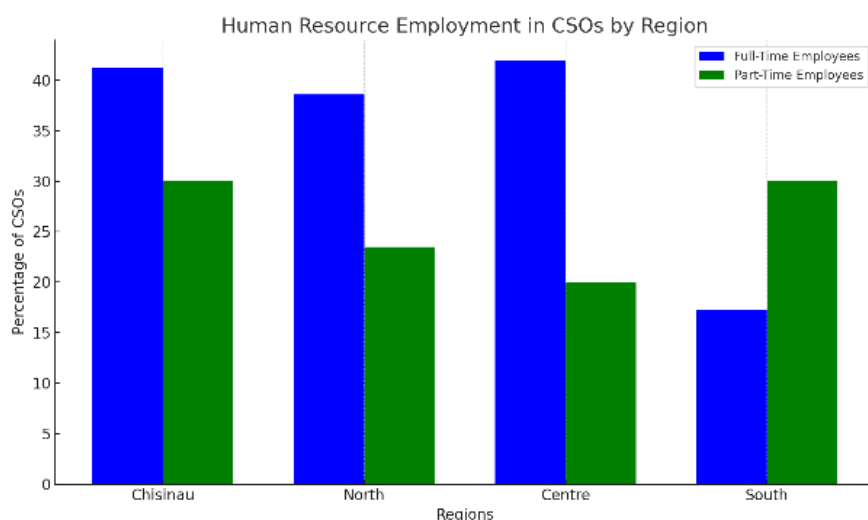
Moldovan CSOs are essential to community development, policy reform, environmental advocacy, and human rights, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and contributing meaningfully to decision-making. Each organization develops structures and approaches suited to its unique objectives, highlighting the importance of respecting these differences rather than imposing rigid frameworks. This flexibility is particularly crucial for grassroots and small CSOs, which often adapt their priorities in response to external factors, such as influence from local authorities, donor pressures on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), and refugee assistance needs. While these shifts demonstrate adaptability, they can sometimes disrupt the balance within the CSO ecosystem. According to the *CSO Initiatives assessment*, 25% of grassroots CSOs find the environment supportive, 40% manage challenges effectively, yet 35% experience instability, reflecting economic and political fluctuations that affect their resilience and adaptability.

H. Organizational Capacities

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Moldova play a crucial role in the country's social fabric, particularly during difficult times. However, their capacity to respond to challenges such as crises, natural disasters, and political instability remains uneven across regions. The effectiveness of CSOs largely depends on the quality and quantity of professionals involved, together with their strategic planning and capacity to adapt to crisis.

1. **Strategic planning** serves as a cornerstone for organizational sustainability. While 76.2% of CSOs reported having a strategic plan, the focus groups revealed that these plans are often donor-driven and limited to short-term objectives. Consequently, 56.1% of CSOs expressed a need for assistance in developing or updating their strategic plans. This need is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where 78% of CSOs in the South and 68.8% in the North require strategic planning support. Beyond the plan itself, many organizations stretch their mandate and field of activities due to a stringent funding environment, sometimes deviating from their core and foundational mandate. This contributes to their resilience and capacity to respond to crisis but comes at the cost of losing their focus and hindering cumulating technical expertise over time.
2. **Governance structures and policies** are vital for operational integrity and transparency. The survey highlighted that 56.2% of CSOs have human resource management policies, and 50.8% have an Internal Procedures Manual. However, the lack of comprehensive policies in these areas continues to challenge CSOs in their governance and operational efficiency. Notably, donors increasingly demand internal policy frameworks, such as procurement guidelines and financial control mechanisms from CSOs. This donor-driven shift towards improved governance has led many CSOs to adopt more structured policies. However, a notable proportion—55.9%—of CSOs expressed a need for further support in developing these governance frameworks. This need is particularly pressing among regional CSOs, with 82.8% in the South and 63.5% in the North requesting assistance.
3. **Human resources** or rather human talent, motivation and spirit are the CSOs differential factors. Approximately 62.1% of CSOs reported having full-time employees, while 37.8% have part-time staff. Overall, 69% of surveyed CSOs indicated they employ staff, amounting to a total of 2,821 employees across 354 organizations. However, the average number of employees per CSO is around 8, with many organizations struggling to meet their staffing needs due to high turnover rates and limited resources. Furthermore, 31.1% of CSOs indicated that they do not involve volunteers, particularly

in urban areas like Chisinau where many organizations operate with paid employees only. This lack of volunteer engagement can hinder the outreach and community involvement of these organizations. Despite staffing efforts, 28.2% of CSOs indicated they have between 76% and 100% of the required personnel to carry out planned activities, while 13.8% reported a significant staff shortage.



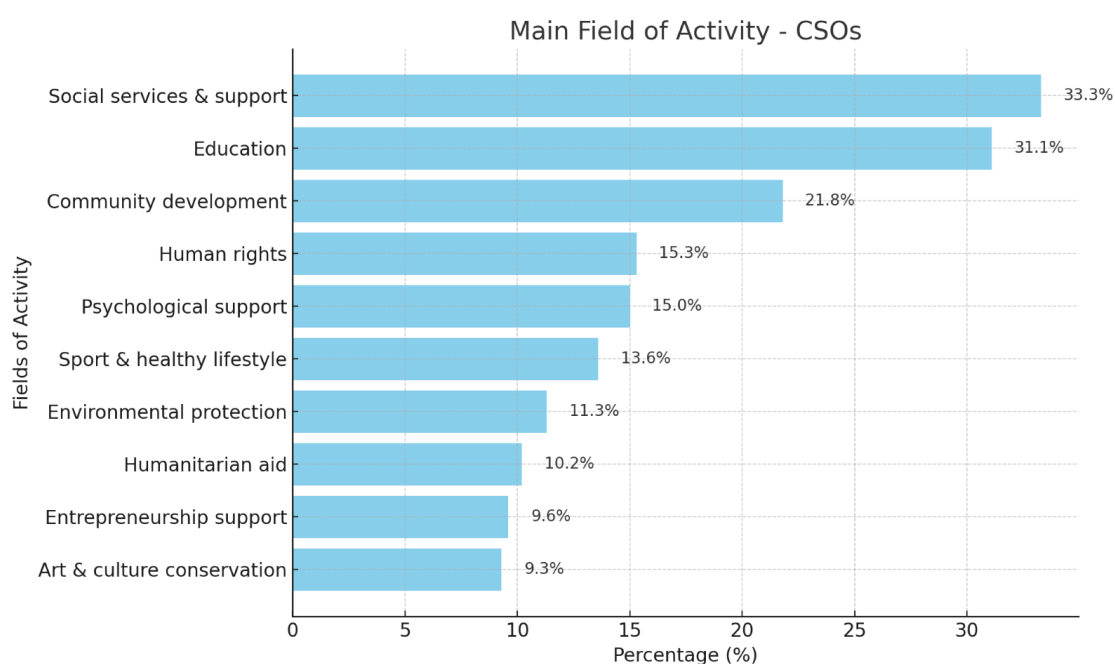
Source: Contact Center, CSO Compass – CSO Study survey

4. **Professional development** is an essential component of CSO capacities. There is a notable gap in some key professional skills among CSOs, especially in rural areas. The lack of trained personnel, coupled with high turnover rates, limits the ability of these organizations to execute their missions effectively. Furthermore, the uneven competition created by the presence of international actors both in terms of salaries and opportunities for professional development, has contributed to the struggles of local actors in employing and retaining qualified staff. Urban CSOs generally have better access to training and capacity-building opportunities. A strong need for ongoing training in areas such as financial management, strategic planning, and resource mobilization is evident across regions. In addition, training needs are prominent in areas such as monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning; financial management; and digital security. These skills become essential as donor requirements become more stringent. Regular training programs and capacity-building workshops are necessary for enhancing the skills of staff in both urban and rural settings.

5. **Resilience and adaptation to unstable contexts** – such as changing political and economic environment in Moldova represents one of the key strengths of CSOs despite the additional challenges they may represent regarding funding stability. Approximately 60% of CSOs report that external pressures have impacted their ability to sustain operations, resulting in financial and operational instability. This has led many organizations to prioritize immediate community needs over long-term goals. The ongoing geopolitical crisis, such as the impact of the Ukrainian refugee influx, has also influenced the financial landscape for CSOs, with funds being redirected to humanitarian assistance, leaving traditional programs underserved. Despite these challenges, Moldovan CSOs demonstrate resilience. Many have adapted their resources and redirected efforts to address urgent community needs. Additionally, a high level of trust from the public toward CSOs further strengthens their position.

I. Programmatic expertise and community impact

The landscape of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Moldova is characterized by a diverse array of activities, beneficiaries, and geographic coverage. Surveyed CSOs primarily focus on five key areas: **Social Services and Support (33.3%)**, addressing the high demand for assistance among vulnerable populations; **Education (31.1%)**, enhancing educational outcomes through non-formal education and youth training; **Community Development (21.8%)**, improving living conditions and fostering community engagement; **Human Rights and Psychological Support (15.3% and 15.0%)**, advocating for human rights while providing essential mental health services; and **Environmental Protection, Humanitarian Aid, and Entrepreneurship Support (11.3% to 9.6%)**, which emphasizes their role in addressing environmental challenges and promoting economic development.



Source: Contact Center, CSO Compass – CSO Study survey

In terms of **beneficiaries**, the findings of the CSO Study confirm those of the CSO Mapping, which provides broader representation. This confirms that CSOs in Moldova serve diverse target groups, reflecting an inclusive approach. Predominantly, they engage **youth** to promote societal development and prioritize **children** through early intervention programs. **Elderly individuals** and **women** are central to many initiatives, addressing their support and advocacy needs. Additionally, CSOs promote inclusivity for **people with disabilities** and **vulnerable populations**, while also responding to crises faced by **refugees** and **minority groups**, particularly due to the conflict in Ukraine.

The research has captured a notable disconnect between donor priorities and community needs, as many programs tend to align more with donor requirements than with local contexts, leading to a mismatch between funding and actual needs. Additionally, the lack of clear programmatic strategies and thematic focus areas results in CSOs overextending into multiple areas without adequately addressing local demands. Furthermore, there are limited opportunities for programmatic and technical professional development.

While approximately 41.5% of these organizations claim to operate at the national level, many also focus on local needs, particularly in rural areas through community development initiatives. Urban CSOs tend to possess greater programmatic expertise and a broader thematic focus, allowing them to effectively manage larger-scale programs and projects that resonate with

national priorities and donor interests. Further, CSOs in Chişinău are generally more aligned with national and international development priorities, engaging in areas such as policy advocacy, democracy, and social inclusion, supported by their established networks.

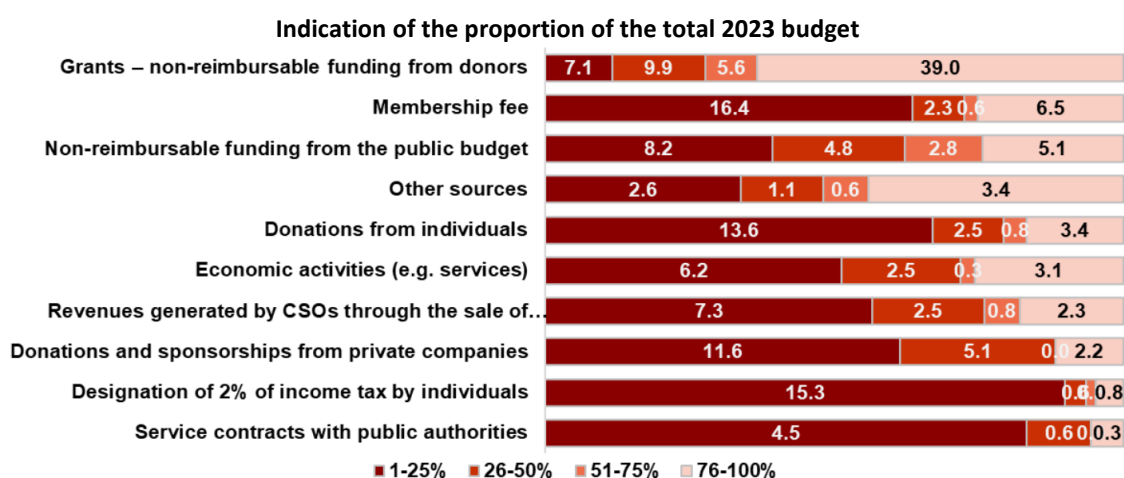
In contrast, CSOs in other regions concentrate on practical community needs, such as local infrastructure, health services, and agricultural support. This localized focus often highlights a gap between regional priorities and those set by national development programs. While rural CSOs address immediate community issues, their limited programmatic specialization may hinder their capacity to manage complex projects effectively, as they typically prioritize localized concerns over broader national agendas.

This comprehensive overview illustrates the critical role of CSOs in addressing the needs and challenges faced by the population in Moldova while highlighting the importance of aligning their strategies with community needs and enhancing collaboration across different levels.

J. Financial Viability

The financial landscape for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Moldova is characterized by a high dependency on external funding, particularly from foreign donors, which serves as the main income source for 61.6% of CSOs. The scale of funding varies widely between urban and rural regions, with annual budgets spanning from zero to over 5 million lei. CSOs in the capital, Chisinau, benefit from better funding access due to their proximity to donor organizations (embassies, UN agencies, international NGOs, private sector) while CSOs in other regions, particularly in rural areas, face significant challenges related to geographic remoteness and language barriers.

In 2023, the collective income for 5,091 CSOs in Moldova was approximately 5.36 billion lei, reflecting the significant economic role CSOs play in service provision. However, the limited diversity of funding sources poses a challenge. Though membership fees, public budgets, and donations from individuals or corporations are recognized as potential income streams, they account for only a small portion of the financial structure for most organizations. About 16.7% of CSOs reported no income, while many struggled to meet their financial needs, underscoring the difficulties in securing sustainable, long-term funding.



Source: Contact Center, CSO Compass – CSO Study survey

Regional disparities are particularly pronounced. CSOs in the South region largely depend on short-term grants and lack opportunities for local co-financing, which hampers their ability to sustain operations independently. Similarly, CSOs in the Centre region struggle to secure paid services and instead rely on partnerships with public and private sectors for financial stability. In the North, CSOs face challenges managing and reporting on complex grants, with a shortage of skills needed for effective financial management.

Urban CSOs, especially those in Chisinau, are generally more financially stable and benefit from enhanced funding access and networking opportunities. This advantage translates into higher revenues, with 8.2% of CSOs in Chisinau reporting budgets exceeding 500,000 lei, a testament to the capital's robust connection to donors and a stronger local economy. Conversely, rural CSOs face substantial financial constraints. These organizations often rely on short-term external funding and lack connections to potential donors, making them vulnerable to financial instability. Approximately 37.3% of rural CSOs depend solely on one funding source—typically foreign grants—putting their long-term viability at risk.

The financial environment of Moldovan CSOs was further influenced by the influx of humanitarian aid following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Many CSOs near customs points benefited from increased funding for humanitarian support, yet this shift in resources also generated competition for funding, particularly affecting CSOs not involved in refugee assistance. Some CSOs expressed concerns that redirected funds left their usual beneficiaries underserved. While the surge in humanitarian funding helped certain organizations financially, others struggled to secure grants for projects outside of refugee assistance, highlighting the need for a more balanced distribution of funds across different areas of civil society.

Several ongoing challenges impact the financial sustainability of CSOs in Moldova:

1. Dependency on short-term and external funding: Across all regions, Moldovan CSOs rely heavily on foreign grants, which limits their ability to achieve long-term sustainability. Rural and regional CSOs are particularly vulnerable due to their reliance on single-source funding. CSOs struggle to secure multi-year funding, and the absence of local financial support mechanisms exacerbates this challenge. Many organizations lack the capacity to absorb larger grants due to limited experience and resources.
2. Complex funding application and reporting processes: The bureaucratic burden associated with grant applications and reporting is especially difficult for smaller CSOs, which often lack the administrative and human resources capacities to meet these requirements.
3. Regional and language barriers: Disparities between regions and language differences, particularly in Gagauzia and Transnistria, limit access to national and international funding opportunities. The Southern CSOs and those in rural areas face challenges in accessing local financial support mechanisms and depend more on short-term external funding.
4. Geographical disparities: CSOs outside Chisinau face additional financial challenges due to their geographical remoteness, lack of donor presence, and limited opportunities for local co-financing. As a result, these organizations struggle with sustainable funding and have fewer connections with potential donors.

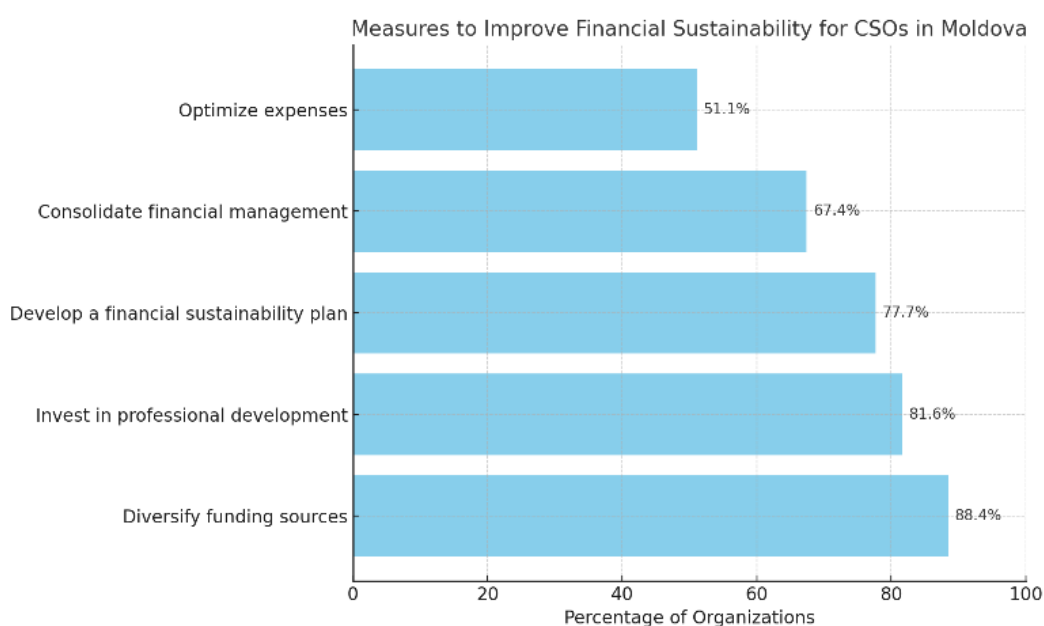
Findings from the **CSO Initiatives assessment** underscore these challenges. Financial instability has been worsened by inadequate state support and shifting donor priorities, especially during the pandemic. Moldova's 2% tax designation mechanism, where taxpayers allocate a portion of their income tax to CSOs, has shown revenue increases; however, larger organizations benefit

disproportionately. Key Informant Interviews reveal that CSOs struggle with limited public funding and experience difficulties exploring alternative revenue sources like social enterprises or crowdfunding. Additionally, competition within the sector, fueled by donor policies, discourages collaboration, weakening the collective impact of Moldovan civil society.

Despite these obstacles, recent public perception surveys offer positive signs. Over half of Moldovan citizens and private sector representatives trust CSOs and recognize their potential for societal development. This trust reflects alignment between CSOs' missions and public expectations, with many citizens and companies expressing a willingness to support CSOs financially.

Grassroots CSOs, however, face particular challenges. Their projects often have short timelines, ranging from a few months to a year, which creates an ongoing need to seek new funding and adds uncertainty to their operations. The absence of governmental support for local and regional CSOs compounds these difficulties, leading to issues in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and securing the resources needed to develop financial management capabilities. One CSO highlighted a notable disparity in funding opportunities between capital-based organizations and those in regional areas, stressing the underappreciated value that rural CSOs bring through local knowledge and community connections.

Recognizing these challenges, many CSOs are working to diversify their income streams, improve fundraising strategies, and enhance staff capacity. Efforts to strengthen financial management and accountability are ongoing, with the goal of attracting new donors and securing long-term support. However, complex funding applications and the scarcity of local financial resources remain barriers to progress.



Source: Contact Center, CSO Compass – CSO Study survey

The changes brought by the refugee crisis have opened new opportunities for humanitarian projects but also underscored existing inequalities in Moldova's civil society sector. CSOs emphasize the need for a more equitable distribution of funds to support both humanitarian and non-humanitarian initiatives, ensuring a balanced approach that addresses the diverse needs of Moldova's communities. Strategic, sustainable support is essential to foster CSOs' resilience, address regional disparities, and enhance their ability to serve effectively across the country.

K. Stakeholder Engagement and Cooperation

CSO involvement in advocacy and policy varies significantly, reflecting different capacities and resources across the sector. Among surveyed organizations, 15% are actively engaged in advocacy and policy dialogue, while 50% participate occasionally, and 10% have limited involvement. A notable 25% of CSOs do not engage in advocacy activities, often due to constraints that include lack of funding (30%), insufficient advocacy skills (20%), staff and time limitations (15%), absence of relevant partners (15%), small organization size (10%), and limited engagement mechanisms (5%). The disparity in advocacy engagement is even more pronounced among grassroots and smaller CSOs, which tend to have fewer resources and skills to participate effectively. Many grassroots organizations report that challenges in navigating complex advocacy environments, coupled with limited access to training, hinder their ability to influence policy in meaningful ways.

In addition to challenges with advocacy, CSOs face significant barriers in conducting outreach and engaging with citizens, particularly marginalized communities. Many organizations highlight that limited financial resources (45%) and lack of capacity or expertise (15%) are primary impediments to effective community engagement. Other challenges include low motivation or interest among community members (15%), time constraints (10%), administrative burdens from donor requirements (10%), and language or cultural barriers (5%). These obstacles are especially evident in rural and regional CSOs, which often have fewer resources and a smaller workforce, further complicating their outreach efforts. For grassroots organizations, these issues underscore the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives to enhance their ability to engage effectively with their communities.

Findings indicate that smaller CSOs, particularly those without established partnerships, often struggle to engage in policy-making due to limited knowledge and insufficient resources. This lack of access to essential information and capacity-building tools restricts smaller and emerging CSOs from building effective policy advocacy strategies. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) underscore that the success of small organizations is often contingent upon collaboration and resource-sharing within the CSO ecosystem, as these organizations are better able to navigate political complexities when they operate collectively. Collaborative efforts could empower grassroots CSOs to make a greater impact in Moldova's policy landscape.

CSOs in urban areas, particularly those based in Chişinău, report stronger relationships with local authorities and benefit from more established networks. Approximately 28% of CSOs indicate very good relationships with first-level local authorities, while 35% describe these relationships as good. This relatively favorable environment enables urban CSOs to engage in policy development, public budgeting, and community projects. However, rural organizations often perceive authorities as reluctant to involve CSOs in public policy discussions, which limits their opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Further, The **CSO Initiatives assessment** reveals a complex and nuanced relationship between Moldovan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and public authorities. Many CSOs report strained interactions with authorities, largely due to divergent interests, lack of communication, differing priorities, and perceived power imbalances. For grassroots and emerging CSOs, these challenges are often heightened as they lack established channels to communicate their perspectives effectively. While certain organizations find ways to navigate these obstacles, many express that exclusion from decision-making processes, particularly when only select organizations are invited to participate, marginalizes a substantial portion of the sector. This exclusion fosters a sense of inequity, diminishing the diversity of voices and perspectives in public forums and limiting broader representation.

The report highlights several domains where CSOs collaborate with local authorities. In policy development, CSOs contribute to local policy formation through consultations, public hearings, and joint initiatives. Many CSOs also play an essential role in service provision, particularly in health and social services, partnering with local authorities to address community needs. Additionally, CSOs frequently collaborate with local administrations on project partnerships, particularly in areas like infrastructure development and community engagement. Grassroots CSOs, while often limited in resources, bring valuable local insights that could enhance these partnerships if authorities were more receptive to including them.

Despite these positive areas of collaboration, several challenges hinder effective cooperation. Local authorities, particularly in rural areas, often lack the necessary resources and capacities to engage with CSOs fully. This is a significant barrier for grassroots organizations that rely on public authority support for various initiatives. The sector's fragmentation further complicates collaboration, with 44.4% of CSOs expressing that the sector's division limits their ability to engage in collective advocacy. Smaller organizations, particularly in rural areas, frequently struggle with advocacy skills and resources, impacting their ability to influence public policy and decision-making processes. Additionally, limited public participation in civic matters exacerbates these challenges, as many citizens lack awareness or skills to engage effectively in civic initiatives.

There are also promising practices that have emerged from successful cooperation between CSOs and local authorities. Public consultations provide a sense of partnership by including CSOs in specific discussions, while participatory budgeting initiatives allow citizens and CSOs to actively engage in fund allocation, fostering transparency and accountability. A notable example is the District Council for Participation in Cahul, which serves as a model of effective CSO involvement in public policy and highlights the benefits of collaboration. While these practices illustrate potential for positive impact, grassroots and regional CSOs need further support to participate in such initiatives fully.

In summary, CSOs in Moldova exhibit resilience and commitment to community engagement despite numerous challenges. The findings underscore the need for targeted support to strengthen collaboration across the sector, particularly for smaller, grassroots organizations in rural areas. By investing in capacity strengthening, improving advocacy skills, and fostering partnerships, CSOs can enhance their role in Moldova's social and policy landscape.

L. Refugee Crisis Response

In 2022, Moldova's CSOs faced unprecedented challenges as they responded to the humanitarian crisis spurred by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees led many organizations to quickly expand their services to provide transportation, accommodation, material aid, and psychological support. This swift adaptation underscored CSOs' flexibility and commitment to addressing urgent needs, with 61.9% of organizations actively involved in delivering essential assistance. Despite this significant engagement, only 39.7% of these CSOs received external funding, forcing 60.3% to rely on their own resources and volunteer support. While this reliance highlighted their resilience, it also revealed financial vulnerabilities within the sector.

The refugee crisis exposed both strengths and challenges across Moldova's CSO landscape. Urban CSOs, benefiting from better-established networks, resources, and emergency plans, generally managed to mobilize support more effectively than their rural counterparts. Equipped with stronger donor connections and response frameworks, these urban organizations adapted swiftly to meet the crisis's demands. By contrast, many rural CSOs faced obstacles due to limited training and resources, making their response slower and less structured. This disparity between

urban and rural organizations emphasized the need for broader capacity-building to enable a more cohesive and responsive sector across regions.

Responding to the crisis offered many CSOs an opportunity to enhance their resilience and visibility, with over half reporting improvements in operational capacities driven by increased funding and crisis management experience. At the same time, the emergency response exposed significant challenges: tight budgets, heavy reliance on volunteer contributions, and short-term project funding intensified staff burnout and financial strain, while the high demand for services stretched their ability to support both refugees and regular beneficiaries. Moreover, the complexity of donor application and reporting processes further hampered the agility needed for rapid response, underscoring the importance of establishing sustainable funding mechanisms and robust preparedness strategies for long-term support.

Collaborations with international organizations and agencies, including INGOs and UN agencies, proved beneficial in strengthening CSOs' response capacities. Regular coordination meetings and resource-sharing efforts allowed Moldovan CSOs to align their efforts more closely with international standards and leverage additional support. Nonetheless, some CSOs expressed concerns over INGOs' dominant role in the civil sector, as increased competition for funding occasionally led to a misalignment between international priorities and local needs. Discussions revealed a call for better coordination among CSOs and more equitable access to resources, especially for smaller organizations that often lack the capacity to secure external funding.

CSOs showcased their strengths in mobilizing community support, effectively engaging volunteers and local resources to meet refugees' needs. This community-driven approach demonstrated CSOs' ability to harness grassroots support and strengthen local solidarity during times of crisis. Furthermore, their visible involvement in refugee assistance elevated their standing within communities, enhancing their recognition and trust among local residents. Donors contributed to capacity-building by offering training that enhanced CSOs' crisis management skills, positioning them to respond more effectively to future challenges.

The response of Moldovan CSOs to the crisis following February 24, 2022, highlights their critical role in providing immediate aid and assistance to vulnerable populations. At the same time, it underscores the sector's ongoing challenges with funding, capacity, and coordination. While CSOs demonstrated resilience and adaptability under difficult circumstances, there remains a pressing need for sustainable funding and effective partnerships to support their ability to respond to future crises effectively.

M. Gender Empowerment in CSOs

Women are a driving force in Moldova's civil society sector, comprising over 67% of the workforce in CSOs and holding 55% of managerial roles. This strong representation highlights their significant contributions, yet disparities remain, especially in leadership positions. While women lead a majority of CSOs in regions like Gagauzia (90.9%) and the South (69%), men still dominate leadership roles at the national level, particularly in urban areas like Chişinău. Traditional gender norms, especially in rural regions, often limit women's influence in decision-making. Many CSOs recognize the need for gender-sensitive policies to promote equality and empower women, yet the implementation of these policies is inconsistent, especially in areas where conservative gender views prevail. In some areas, youth is raised with the misconception that voluntary and NGO work is for women while men should focus on business.

The leadership landscape for women in Moldovan CSOs reflects a blend of empowerment and persistent challenges. Women leaders face intense pressures, including high workloads, burnout, and a lack of structural support for their health and well-being. Their roles are demanding, and societal expectations, combined with unpaid domestic responsibilities, place further strain on them. Many women experience pre-burnout conditions, yet only 20% consider leaving their positions. Their resilience is driven by a commitment to social impact, the desire for change, and intrinsic values, rather than financial gain.

CSOs place a strong emphasis on supporting women as beneficiaries, with 42.6% reporting that women comprise more than half of those they serve. Additionally, 72.9% of organizations state that they consider gender needs in their activities, employing methods to ensure equal participation and inclusion. However, 13.2% report taking no specific steps to address gender-specific needs, revealing a gap in comprehensive gender-sensitive approaches within some CSOs.

Findings from the **CSO Initiatives assessment** indicate that approximately 70% of surveyed CSOs have teams where women outnumber men, reflecting a positive trend in female representation. Yet, underlying cultural barriers continue to inhibit women's full participation in leadership, signaling a need for targeted capacity-building to equip women with skills for effective leadership and decision-making within CSOs. Addressing these barriers through consistent gender-sensitive policies would not only support women in leadership roles but also enhance the overall resilience and effectiveness of the sector.

The impact of recent social and economic disruptions on civic engagement has varied across demographics. About 35% of CSOs report decreased participation for both men and women due to financial instability, while 30% observed no significant change. Interestingly, 20% noted increased involvement among women but a decline in men's participation, possibly due to shifting societal priorities, and 10% reported increased engagement across both genders, driven by a heightened sense of urgency. These trends underscore the importance of integrating gender equality into CSO governance and operations to foster inclusive and adaptive approaches that reflect the diverse needs and contributions of all community members.

The 2022 Ukraine refugee crisis underscored the essential role women play in humanitarian response. A UN Women study highlighted that women-led organizations were pivotal in providing shelter, food, and psychological support to refugees. Despite these critical contributions, these organizations often faced challenges, including limited funding and insufficient recognition. The study emphasizes the need for capacity-building initiatives that empower women and promote inclusive policies to bolster their impact and advance gender equality within the sector.

In summary, while women are highly represented in Moldova's civil society landscape, they continue to face systemic inequalities, especially in leadership roles in urban areas. The findings emphasize that to fully harness women's potential in CSOs, consistent gender-sensitive policies, and targeted capacity-building are essential as well as addressing early age gender misconceptions. By addressing these disparities and supporting women's leadership, Moldovan CSOs can enhance their effectiveness and resilience, contributing significantly to the country's socio-political and economic landscape.

VII. SETTING THE NEXT LANDMARKS

The findings highlight the dual nature of organizational capacity in Moldovan CSOs—strengthened by resilience and community trust but challenged by funding instability, trained human resource shortages, and insufficient governance frameworks. Addressing these issues will require targeted support for strengthening the ecosystem, especially for regional and rural CSOs, to enhance their sustainability and enable them to fulfill their roles as agents of social change effectively. By focusing on professional development, diversifying funding sources, and strengthening internal policies, Moldovan CSOs can bolster their capacity to serve their communities in both stable and crisis conditions. Initiatives like the CSO Compass Map can enhance transparency and foster trust with stakeholders, while CSO collaboration platforms (e.g. CSO Forum, CSO Task Force) could strengthen coordination, allowing organizations to pool resources, share knowledge, and engage in unified advocacy. Moreover, establishing a transparent system of public accreditation is critical—especially in vital sectors such as social protection, education, and health—to ensure that organizations meet high standards of accountability and quality in their service delivery role. Finally, ensuring openness to collaborate and spaces for effective participation and consultations on public and private matters affecting local communities will be critical for having the whole Moldovan society move in the same direction.

N. Towards a more comprehensive CSO Passport

The current categories of the state registry of non-commercial organizations present some limitations for the identification of civil society organizations and the capacity to follow-up on their development but also their supervision (e.g., active/inactive, sectors of activities). The CSO Compass has presented some tools to facilitate their geographical mapping, their capacities assessment, their activeness and their collaboration canvas.

This “**CSO Passport**” while being too comprehensive for a state registration, could be reviewed to identify some required self-declaration categories and typologies beneficial for improved collaboration between the state and the local civil society organizations and visualized for all on a hosted government-endorsed platform. In addition, the **CSO Compass Map** could complement and serve as an integral part of Moldova’s yearly mapping of civil society organizations, establishing a continuous process to enhance transparency, governance, and collaboration within the sector and measure progress (see section D).

These two tools, an enhanced mandatory state CSO Registry and a voluntary CSO Compass Map, would provide an up-to-date, accessible profile for each CSO, covering essential information required for identification of civil society as well as detailed information for further exploring their capacities and purposes. While the CSO Registry should focus on essential identification of more consistent and permanent information (e.g. governance structures, sectors of activities), the CSO Compass Map can complement this information with more changing variables (e.g. areas covered, yearly results).

Enhanced transparency and reporting on the core mandate and objectives of each CSO (established in the CSO Registry) as well as complementary information on their results and achievements (reported on the CSO Compass Map) would foster trust and reliability among stakeholders, including donors, government bodies, and other organizations.

In addition to improving transparency, the CSO Passport (Registry and Map) can function as a screening tool to identify risks such as money laundering, political affiliations, or other activities that could compromise the sector's integrity. CSOs would annually update their profiles to reflect changes, maintaining accuracy and continuity. This also enables stakeholders to track progress, compliance, and adherence to sectoral standards over time.

The development of the CSO Passport should prioritize a user-friendly interface that minimizes administrative burdens while ensuring comprehensive data collection. Key sections might include mission and vision, governance and leadership, financial audits, funding sources, primary activities, and partnerships. To increase engagement, the platform could offer incentives for CSOs that regularly update their profiles, such as visibility to potential donors or access to exclusive funding opportunities.

Ultimately, the CSO Passport would enhance Moldova's civil society ecosystem by promoting accountability, safeguarding against potential risks, and creating a structured foundation for collaboration, benefiting both CSOs and their stakeholders.

Through these collaborative and structured efforts, Moldova's CSO ecosystem can enhance its resilience, accountability, and sustainability, resulting in a stronger civil society sector.

Stakeholders:

- State Chancellery guiding the policy on the '*Registrul de stat al unităților de drept privind - organizațiile necomerciale înregistrate în Republica Moldova*'.
- CSOs advocating for classification and accreditation adjusted to the needs of the respective sector.

O. Closing the center/periphery gaps between CSOs

Ensuring equal opportunities of access to information, funding, capacity development and visibility is a requirement for closing the identified center to periphery gaps. Two different gaps were identified and require consideration. On the one hand, between the center region including Chisinau with the rest of the regions but with a larger gap with the South and, while the study could not capture it fully, from qualitative information with Transnistrian region. On the other hand, between the urban CSOs and the rural ones.

1. **Harnessing the power and potential of technology** can contribute to close some of the existing gaps. A **strong digitalization strategy for CSOs** can ensure that some barriers of access to information, visibility and, to some extent, capacity development are removed. **Broader diffusion of information** through newsletters, public information on the web, social media and media. **Massive digital capacity building tools** using webinars, online courses and virtual trainings accessible to all without requiring lengthy displacements and diverting attention from core activities. In addition, providing registries and tools (e.g. CSO Map) and **support visibility of CSOs** (social media, websites, etc.) to facilitate their identification.
2. **Mutualizing specialized required services for rural CSOs** can lead to reducing the human resources gap identified in some of them. Skilled professionals in support fields (e.g., finance, grants writing, MEAL) are more scarce in peripheral and rural areas. Whenever available locally they should aim to cover and support several organizations and be trained, if required, to increase their capacity to support several organizations.
3. **Discuss the relevance of establishing regional CSO structures** that could represent and advocate for the interests of CSOs from their regions. Alternatively, or in addition to,

regional diversity and representation must be taken into account whenever spaces of representation, participation or discussion are opened.

4. **Targeted funding available for peripheral regions and rural areas** must be prioritized by donors without penalizing the low caseload. These local projects and initiatives should be flexible enough to accommodate for the diversity of local needs and ensure that the focus is locally-led and not imposed by the donors or the center.

CSOs outside of the central region play a **critical role in diminishing the growing inequality in Moldova**, providing essential services to the most vulnerable as well as fighting poverty and corruption at the local level. **Funding local community CSOs must be a priority** for the Government, the international community and Moldovan society in general. Over time, this may help to curve the accelerated urbanization of Moldova and progressive emptying of rural areas.

Stakeholders:

- Donors by ensuring that 1) financial resources reach in sufficient amounts regional and rural CSOs; 2) capacity development processes have strategies to include regional and rural CSOs, using digital means, whenever possible.
- Government by providing **co-financing opportunities** to encourage sustainability of rural CSOs; 5) Facilitating **multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms** that ensure CSO regional and rural representation for their input in policymaking.

P. Capacity strengthening of CSO ecosystem

Local CSOs in Moldova face significant challenges, including the need for enhanced organizational management capacity, technical skills, and effective stakeholder coordination. By prioritizing the strengthening of the entire CSO ecosystem, we foster an environment where organizations can work synergistically, share knowledge, and engage in collective action. This ecosystem-focused strategy not only promotes resilience but also enhances accountability to the affected populations.

1. **Harmonize capacity building programs:** CSO international donors (inclusive of all forms of multilateral, bilateral, technical, UN and INGO) should coordinate efforts to avoid duplication and ensure CSOs are not overwhelmed by conflicting priorities or having some overfunded for the same purpose and others underfunded for critical activities. Some good practices include the EU Tamis database, donor coordination meetings, refugee response working groups and INGO Forum exchange of information but are limited by a lack single platform of coordination for localization and CSO development. Coordinated programs would prevent duplication, reduce administrative burdens, and provide Moldovan CSOs with streamlined support, fostering a cohesive, resilient civil society aligned with both local and international priorities.
2. **Mutual learning and equity:** Local CSOs should be treated as equitable partners in the capacity-building process, ensuring that learning is reciprocal and contextually relevant. Further, CSOs should be involved as co-creators in their capacity-building actions, fostering self-learning and ownership of development processes.
3. **Comprehensive capacity building:** Capacity building programmes should aim to move beyond traditional training and workshops to include mentoring, coaching, accompaniment, peer learning, and field-based exposure. This holistic approach supports deeper, more sustainable skill development in areas such as financial management or advocacy, but also leadership building and systemic change, equipping CSOs with tools for long-term growth. For some CSO sectors, particular focus must be

given to learning to take care of the mental health and psychological wellbeing of the CSO staff (e.g., media, social services, health, etc.).

4. **Tailored and flexible funding:** Funding should be provided that adapts to the unique needs of CSOs, allowing for more responsive and innovative approaches. Resources should be allocated for essential areas such as technology upgrades, financial management systems, and the development of fundraising and communication strategies.
5. **Common needs assessments:** Involve CSOs in needs assessments to ensure capacity-building programs remain aligned with current needs and emerging challenges. This collaborative approach also supports more relevant and tailored grant opportunities. Further, the approach supports outreach to regional, rural and smaller CSOs.
6. **Resource mobilization strategies:** Help CSOs diversify their income streams through grants, partnerships, donations, and social enterprises. Effective resource mobilization reduces financial vulnerability, strengthens donor relationships, and builds the capacity for long-term sustainability.
7. **Enhancing CSOs capacities and financial accountability:** Donors and INGOs should design policies that promote capacity strengthening, including targeted training in financial management, grant writing, and strategic planning. Strengthening financial accountability builds trust with donors and stakeholders, ensuring compliance with state requirements and increasing funding opportunities.
8. **Utilize existing resources:** Leverage existing resources, such as learning platforms (e.g., Kaya), to provide accessible training materials without duplicating efforts. These platforms can serve as cost-effective tools for enhancing organizational knowledge and skills.
9. **Integration of technology and innovation:** Support access to digital tools, data analytics, and social media to enable CSOs to engage wider audiences, monitor progress, and deliver impact more efficiently. Leveraging technology also improves transparency and resource management.
10. **Gender mainstreaming:** Implement gender mainstreaming workshops and resources tailored to grassroots CSOs, promoting inclusive decision-making and gender-sensitive project planning. These initiatives can foster diversity, integrate gender perspectives into organizational policies, and strengthen women's leadership roles.

Stakeholders:

- CSOs themselves as direct beneficiaries of capacity building measures, acting as co-creators in capacity building programmes addressing their real needs.
- National and international donors ensuring coordination and more efficient support that, together with a fairer share of resources.

Q. Monitor progress of CSO ecosystem resilience

To promote the sustainability of capacity-strengthening efforts for the CSO ecosystem in Moldova, an integrated, co-creative approach is essential, involving collaboration among donors, INGOs, the government, and CSOs themselves. The following steps are recommended:

1. **Develop and agree upon key performance indicators (KPIs)** that track both capacity strengthening and long-term sustainability outcomes of the CSO ecosystem. KPIs should be measurable, realistic, and reflective of both short-term progress and longer-term impact, ensuring accountability not only to the donors and partners, but also to the constituencies of the CSOs.
2. **Regularly update the CSO Map** to capture evolving capacities, needs, and achievements. This dynamic resource can help donors and partners identify key areas for targeted support, fostering a more responsive and effective ecosystem.
3. **Adopt a pragmatic approach to target-setting in capacity-building programs**, balancing ambition with feasibility. This ensures that CSOs achieve meaningful milestones that contribute to long-term goals. This should always take into account the feedback and involvement of the communities they serve.
4. **Implement comprehensive performance measurement** with organizational baseline and endline assessments, beneficiary feedback surveys, focus groups, and audit reports as part of the capacity strengthening actions. These evaluations provide critical insights into progress and areas for improvement, ensuring continuous development and accountability to both donors and their constituencies.
5. **Equip CSOs with tools, expertise, and resources for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).** This enables CSOs to measure impact, improve their practices, and demonstrate accountability, enhancing their credibility with donors and their constituencies.

Stakeholders:

- CSOs as the primary beneficiaries of capacity-strengthening efforts, with enhanced structures benefiting both their operations and service delivery to their communities.
- Donors by providing technical expertise, funding, and resources for strengthening CSO monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and digitalization agenda.
- State Chancellery to establish some indicators that would help monitor at the national level the development of the civil society organization (e.g. annual financial volume, number of active/reporting organizations, etc.)

R. Strengthen existing CSO cooperation platforms

To strengthen the CSO ecosystem in Moldova, continuous support to existing CSO platforms (forums, networks, working groups, task forces, etc.) is essential for fostering information sharing, cooperation, advocacy, and capacity building. This approach can be structured around several key elements:

1. **Identify and support “resource” or “umbrella” organizations** that coordinate on specific topics of interest, that support thematic cooperations for the organizations. Some good examples include organizations such as the Alliance of Organisations for People with Disabilities – AOPD, the National Youth Council of Moldova – CNTM, the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection – APSCF, the

Resource Center of Moldovan Human Rights NGOs – CReDO and the National Coalition “Life without violence”, among others. These organizations can manage mapping efforts, identify needs, and establish self-regulation mechanisms, positioning themselves as advocates and representatives of the sector, including taking the responsibility for capacity building across the sector. A “membership label” within such umbrella organizations can incentivize adherence to best practices and attract active participation.

2. **Build on the success of Inter-Agency Refugee Response working groups** by establishing regional or thematic fora that extend beyond refugee response and transit to broader CSO and sectorial needs. These groups provide essential spaces for CSO collaboration and networking, and formalizing their structure without institutionalizing them will help preserve their flexibility and relevance. Conduct consultations to determine whether these platforms should be structured by region, topic, or both, aligning with the diverse needs of Moldova’s CSOs, but also on the usefulness of these spaces as for sectorial coordination and collaboration with national government, local public authorities and other international actors.
3. **Facilitate regular, structured networking sessions for CSOs** to exchange best practices, innovations, and resources. Information-sharing platforms can amplify collective impact, allowing CSOs to address complex social challenges collaboratively. Encourage joint advocacy efforts and resource-sharing initiatives, fostering solidarity and reducing duplication. Organizations having contributed to the CSO Compass Map can further animate sessions and maintain regular exchanges using online tools to discuss sector challenges and propose solutions to common challenges.
4. **Foster partnerships and joint advocacy by connecting CSOs with existing national and regional platforms.** Hence, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders can build a unified voice for advocacy and representation. Joint advocacy efforts, coordinated through these platforms, increase the sector’s ability to influence policy and secure funding, enhancing long-term sustainability.

Through these efforts, Moldova’s CSO ecosystem can become more cohesive, resilient, and effective in achieving shared goals, ensuring lasting social impact.

Stakeholders:

- CSOs by actively participating in consultations to define the structure and focus of the networking platforms; share best practices, innovations and resources to strengthen the collective impact and engage in joint advocacy efforts.
- Existing resource/umbrella organizations by leading sector-wide coordination and taking responsibility for the capacity building efforts across the sector.
- Donors by providing funding and opportunities for networking sessions, capacity building and coordination efforts.

S. Public, private and international partnerships

A resilient and well-functioning CSO ecosystem in Moldova requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, ensuring that civil society organizations operate effectively within a broader framework of public, private, and international partnerships. Strengthening these relationships fosters sustainability, maximizes impact, and aligns CSO efforts with Moldova’s broader development and EU accession goals.

1. **Public and Civil Society partnerships** are essential for complementing state services, particularly in areas where public institutions lack capacity or resources. While some level of **accreditation** is necessary to formalize these partnerships, collaboration should go beyond regulatory frameworks to include **referral mechanisms** and joint initiatives that enhance service delivery. For example, CSOs often provide critical social services—such as psychological support, community outreach, and assistance for marginalized groups—that fall outside the scope of public institutions. Strengthening **structured cooperation** between CSOs and local authorities can improve resource allocation, ensure better service coverage, and create a **more integrated support system** for citizens.
2. **An innovative, efficient and transparent mechanism through which Moldova’s significant publicly owned land and buildings can be allocated to CSOs** is needed. Especially in urban setups, there is much needed space for civil society development and giving preferential access to CSOs to spaces rather than selling them to private actors will have a very positive impact. Facilitating access to low-cost facilities will foster the development of creative industries (e.g. theater, art, film), create savings in investment and rent maximizing service-delivery and expanding the public sector contribution to the development of diverse fields.
3. **Private sector engagement** with civil society should move beyond traditional **funding mechanisms** to active collaboration on shared social objectives. Businesses, professional associations, and chambers of commerce can work alongside CSOs to **co-develop programs** that address community needs, contribute expertise, and provide in-kind support. Successful models include **supermarkets donating unsold food** to support vulnerable populations during critical periods, or private companies **partnering with CSOs on workforce development programs** for marginalized groups. Encouraging **corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives** that integrate CSOs into their operational strategies can create long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships that go beyond financial transactions.
4. **International and local CSO collaboration** presents a significant opportunity in the context of EU accession. International organizations bring valuable **expertise, technical capacity, and best practices** that can strengthen Moldova’s CSO sector and align it with European standards. Local CSOs, in turn, provide **on-the-ground knowledge, community trust, and cultural insights**, making them essential partners in implementing effective programs. Strengthening networking opportunities, joint projects, and **knowledge-sharing mechanisms** will ensure that Moldova’s civil society is well-prepared for the institutional and regulatory shifts required for EU integration.

Stakeholders

- National and local authorities by 1) developing enabling regulatory frameworks to ensure effective cooperation between CSOs and public institutions; 2) developing formal accreditation mechanisms to enable structured cooperation between public institutions and CSOs; 3) Establish **referral systems** where CSOs complement public services, particularly in social protection, healthcare, and education;
- Private sector and business associations by: 1) engaging in **co-development of social initiatives** with CSOs beyond traditional philanthropy; 2) establishing **sustainable CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) partnerships**, such as donating resources, expertise, or services to support social programs; 3) Providing **skills-based volunteering and mentorship** to CSOs, strengthening their financial and operational management; 4) Facilitating CSO access to **business networks** for funding, visibility, and project collaborations.

- International organizations by: 1) offering technical expertise and best practices to local CSOs; 2) funding CSO – private sector engagement models, incentivizing businesses to collaborate meaningfully with civil society.

T. Stakeholders' engagement and advocacy

To enhance stakeholder engagement and advocacy within Moldova's CSO ecosystem, a collaborative and strategic approach should be implemented. Targeted toward all donors (bilateral cooperation, UN agencies, INGOs, private donors), public authorities, and CSOs, this approach emphasizes partnerships, equitable funding, and inclusive policy-making.

1. **Donors, in particular INGOs, to collaborate with local CSOs as strategic partners** rather than mere implementers, particularly in crisis responses. This partnership model empowers local CSOs, recognizing their on-the-ground expertise and fostering sustainable impact.
2. **CSOs should have a seat at the table in key working groups and discussions** from the beginning, allowing them to represent community needs effectively. Building strategic alliances at both national and regional levels strengthens CSOs' collective voice and their influence on public policy.
3. **Funding allocated to local CSOs to increase, with a suggested target of 25%** in Moldova. Multi-year and flexible funding to be considered, allowing CSOs to allocate resources where most needed, cover administrative costs, retain essential equipment, and enhance visibility.
4. **Grant applications and management to be simplified and adapted** to match the capacities of diverse CSOs. Simplified processes improve access, especially for smaller organizations with limited administrative resources.
5. **Support the development of a stronger philanthropic culture** to diversify funding sources for CSOs, creating stable, community-supported financial streams that enable CSOs to adapt to evolving needs.
6. **Advocate for public authorities to establish transparent communication channels and inclusive mechanisms** for CSO participation, as to incorporate of CSO expertise and perspectives.
7. **Support coalitions among CSOs** to unify advocacy efforts, leverage shared resources, and amplify impact on policy. Educate citizens on civic engagement, empowering communities to collectively influence policy decisions.

By strengthening alliances, advocating for flexible funding, and fostering inclusive governance, Moldova's CSO ecosystem can effectively engage stakeholders, drive responsive policy-making, and contribute to a resilient civil society.

Stakeholders:

- Donors: 1) facilitate **knowledge-sharing and technical expertise exchange**, equipping CSOs with best practices in advocacy and stakeholder engagement; 2) assist in **simplifying grant application and reporting requirements**, making funding more accessible to smaller CSOs; 3) **Increase direct funding** to local CSOs and shift toward

- **multi-year flexible funding models;** 4) provide **core operational funding** for CSOs to cover administrative costs, retain staff, and invest in visibility.
- Public authorities: 1) develop **inclusive mechanisms** for CSO participation in legislative and regulatory processes; 2) Recognize and support **CSO coalitions** as legitimate advocacy actors.

U. New opportunities of the EU Accession process

For the European Union, civil society plays a pivotal role in the process of Accession. Strengthened consultation, participation and inputs from Moldovan civil society are expected throughout the process. To effectively organize and prioritize contributions while avoiding this new requirement and incremental work once again diverts the attention of local CSOs from the foundational purpose and target population, a few steps must be taken.

1. **Strengthen the existing networks of CSO and analyze sector by sector if more are required** for representative and comprehensive participation of all actors. Not much is known about the financial stability, governance structures and real capacities of existing networks of CSO. A dedicated effort to better understand them and strengthen them as actors that will play an important role in this advocacy is required.
2. **Further analyze and extend the CSO Map information to facilitate identification of organizations that could contribute to the process.** By extending the CSO Map and including additional organizations, a more resilient group to contribute for each sector could be identified.
3. **Evolve CSO Compass to a communication platform** that would facilitate access and collection of information to and from local CSO. This will cover an existing gap of diffusion of information towards the CSOs and facilitate dialogues that are required for an effective negotiation that takes into account the local challenges and perspectives.
4. **Prepare for new mechanisms and sources of funding** that will come during the process of EU Accession. During the process of accession, the EU unlocks significant sources of funding for CSOs in certain areas of work and through certain mechanisms (e.g. channeled through implementing partners like People in Need or directly through the state Ministry's and agencies). CSOs need to better understand how these mechanisms work and prepare a new set of project proposals to access some of this competitive funding.

Stakeholders:

- European Union: 1) Sensitize on the EU Accession process steps and requirements, and particularly on the expected role for local CSOs, 2) Provide additional funding opportunities for CSOs to facilitate effective support and participation on the EU process.
- National authorities: Map and identify existing gaps of capacity and information for the EU Accession in which CSOs could contribute effectively.
- CSOs: Required to better understand the scope, benefits and mechanisms of participation throughout the EU Accession process.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The CSO Compass initiative offers an in-depth look into Moldova's civil society landscape, revealing both its strengths and challenges. Moldova's **CSOs are vital to community development, policy reform, and humanitarian support**. However, they operate within a landscape marked by financial instability, human resource constraints, and uneven access to decision-making processes. These challenges, underscored by reliance on foreign funding, disproportionately affect smaller and regional CSOs, making sustainable impact challenging without systemic support.

One of the central findings is the **need for diversified funding sources**. Currently, 61.6% of Moldovan CSOs depend on external grants, often with short-term project limitations. The impact of recent crises, such as the influx of refugees from Ukraine, further highlighted this issue, as many CSOs responded promptly despite limited resources. At the beginning of the crisis, 65% of CSOs participated in the response; however, today, only 20% still consider refugees from Ukraine as a target group, despite them constituting less than 4% of Moldova's total population. This shift underscores the **need for long-term, adaptable funding models that balance emergency response with ongoing local needs**, ensuring CSOs remain resilient in evolving crises. To build resilience and sustainability, it is essential for donors and international partners to transition towards multi-year, flexible funding models that allow CSOs to align resources with local needs and reduce dependence on temporary project-based grants.

Current realities oblige to have an honest conversation on the size of the Moldovan CSO Landscape that is sustainable in the long-term and provides the most efficient outcome to support the population, advocate effectively and maintain capacity to represent effectively citizens interest in regard to the state. Too many civil society organizations start competing for funding, visibility and staff. Too few leave people underserved, creates a capture of resources without apparent results, hamper innovative approaches and cannot respond effectively to crisis or diverse needs. **Civil society space in Moldova needs to continue to grow, not in numbers, but in capacities**.

Strengthening governance structures within CSOs is equally crucial. The study notes that only about half of the CSOs have comprehensive policies in place, with even fewer having formalized governance frameworks that meet donor standards. The introduction of a **CSO Passport** (enhanced mandatory public registry and optional extended mapped information) **could enhance accountability, transparency and visibility**. By providing accessible profiles with information on each organization's governance, activities, and financial health, the stakeholders' trust would increase and improve coordination within the sector. To maximize its utility, it is required to have a clear typology or categorization of CSOs, distinguishing between different levels of organizational capacity, focus areas, and operational models.

For effective advocacy, **the strengthening of existing local and regional CSO cooperation platforms is recommended**. These structures would provide CSOs with opportunities for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and joint advocacy, particularly in rural areas where organizations often lack resources. Such platforms would facilitate joint problem-solving and amplify the sector's voice in policy discussions, fostering a unified approach to civil society development. Additionally, **digitalization efforts should be accelerated to bridge the urban-rural gap in CSO capacity**. Many rural organizations struggle with limited access to training, funding platforms, and networking opportunities, making digital tools an essential lever for equalizing opportunities and strengthening sector-wide coordination.

Capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs of smaller CSOs should also be prioritized. While larger CSOs, particularly those in urban areas, have stronger access to training and resources, smaller organizations often lack these opportunities. Regular training programs in financial management, digital literacy, and strategic planning are essential to equip these organizations for both stable and crisis conditions. Moreover, **capacity-building should include gender-sensitive programming to promote inclusive leadership, as women comprise a significant portion of Moldova's CSO workforce** yet face systemic barriers to leadership roles. To further enhance resilience, CSOs should develop internal crisis response mechanisms, ensuring that organizations can effectively transition from emergency response to long-term recovery without destabilizing their core operations. Investing in adaptive strategies—such as financial reserves, cross-sector partnerships, and local resource mobilization—will allow CSOs to emerge stronger from future crises.

Additionally, **a Nexus approach should be integrated by both CSOs and donors, ensuring better coordination between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.** By embedding long-term solutions into immediate responses, CSOs can avoid dependency cycles and create sustainable pathways for affected populations.

In conclusion, Moldova's civil society stands at a pivotal moment, with significant challenges, but also opportunities to enhance its resilience and impact. By fostering collaboration among CSOs, government bodies, private sector and international donors, and implementing structured support measures such as the CSO Passport and strengthening existing CSO platforms, Moldova can build a more cohesive, responsive civil society sector. In addition, strengthened with digitalization, crisis resilience mechanisms, and a planned Nexus transition, **Moldova can achieve the ultimate goal of creating a sustainable, impactful civil society that serves as a catalyst for social change and supports effectively the country's accession to the European Union.**

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