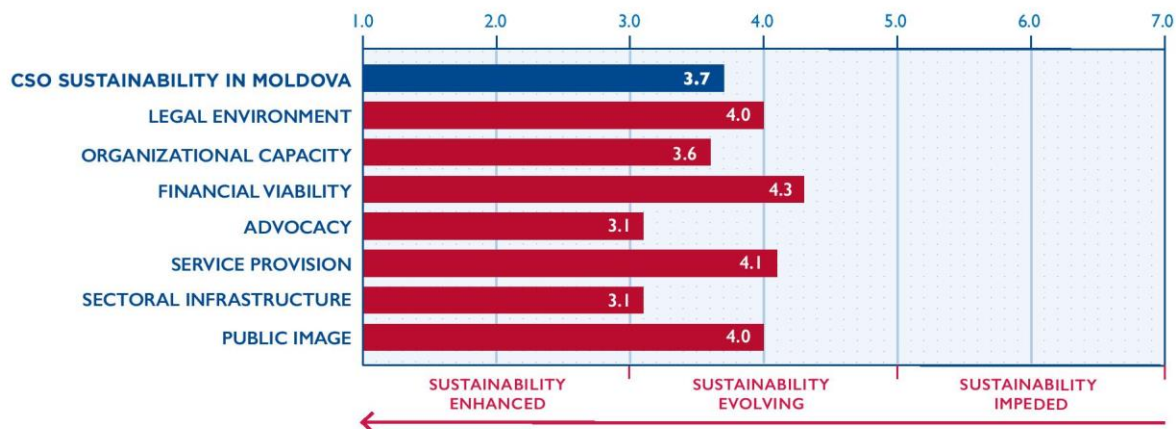


OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



The year 2020 in Moldova was marked by a relatively equal number of positive and negative events.

Moldova confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on March 7, 2020. The government was quick to restrict movement and public gatherings following the pandemic's outbreak but was not able to offer sufficient medical care to its citizens to protect them from the spread of the virus. By December 20, 2020, over 135,000 cases had been confirmed and more than 2,700 people had died. The twin shocks of the pandemic and a severe drought resulted in the economy shrinking by 7 percent. The government failed to develop a program of socio-economic support to provide some relief to the public, as well as to the business and non-profit sectors. At the initial stages of the crisis, CSOs responded more quickly and effectively to constituents' needs than government institutions and other social support services. However, many CSOs were forced to limit or fully suspend their services because of the economic constraints they faced.

The presidential election was held in November 2020 and was won by the pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu, who received 58 percent of the vote following a staunch anti-corruption campaign. Sandu is the country's first female president. CSOs actively monitored the elections by organizing exit polls, delegating observers to polling stations, and periodically publishing election monitoring reports. In its monitoring of the election, the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (CALC), a platform of thirty-four Moldovan CSOs, identified only minor electoral violations, which it determined fell within the international standards and did not have a significant influence on the election's results.

After a two-year delay, the country's parliament finally approved the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations in its final reading on June 11; the new law entered into force on August 27, 2020. Although the then-draft law had been approved in its first reading by parliament in 2018, the bill was delayed following a number of contradictory debates on its content and several attempts to include amendments that would have limited, rather than promoted, the activities of CSOs. The final version of the law included recommendations that had been provided during consultations with civil society. The eventual passage of the law was largely the result of continued pressure from the donor and development community, which threatened to withdraw its planned financial support to the government if parliament did not pass the legislation. The improvement in the legal framework resulted in a slight improvement in overall CSO sustainability in 2020.

According to the State Register of Non-Commercial Organizations maintained by the Public Services Agency (PSA), there were 14,324 non-commercial organizations registered in Moldova as of December 2020. Approximately 13,160 of these organizations can be considered CSOs; the rest are public institutions, political parties, and other socio-political organizations that do not correspond to the definition of CSOs used by the CSO Sustainability Index. About 78 percent (10,210) of registered CSOs are public associations. The other 22 percent include private institutions, foundations, religious groups, trade unions, patronage associations, non-commercial newspapers and magazines, representations of international non-profit organizations, water users' associations, and

others. In 2020, 488 new CSOs were registered, including 388 public associations, 17 foundations, and 11 private institutions. The National Bureau of Statistics indicated that in 2020, 3,525 CSOs—or about 27 percent of all registered organizations—submitted financial statements or statements that they had no income in 2019. As all CSOs are required to submit annual financial statements, this is often considered an indicator of active CSOs.

CSOs in the Transnistrian region, a separatist territorial unit in the eastern part of Moldova, continue to operate under difficult conditions. They are continuously harassed by the authorities and subjected to various forms of repression, such as intimidation by representatives of the Local Security Service (MGB) and risks of having criminal proceedings brought against them. CSOs operating in the region that receive external funding cannot engage in so-called “political activity,” which includes a wide range of activities such as protests, criticism of local government, publishing analysis of laws or legislative drafts, and advocacy activities aimed at changing or impacting government policy. Further, CSOs there are required to report to the local tax authorities information about the funding they receive, as well as the programs and activities they plan to implement in the region. Violations of these legal provisions can lead to harsh sanctions or even the liquidation of the organization. According to the Register of Public Associations and Political Parties of the Transnistrian region, as of December 2020 there were 631 registered CSOs, of which ten were political parties. This is a significant decline, as there were 2,479 CSOs registered in the region in 2019; this may be due to updates made to the CSO registry. Of the total number of currently registered CSOs, only about 100 are estimated to be active.

Approximately 550 CSOs are officially registered in the Autonomous Territorial Unit Gagauzia (ATU Gagauzia), although only 20 to 25 percent of these are estimated to be active. The main goals and areas of activity of CSOs in the region are the consolidation of democracy, the promotion of human rights, civic education, the establishment of partnerships between civil society and authorities, and transparency of the decision-making process.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.0



The legal environment governing the CSO sector improved in 2020 due to the adoption of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations in June. The new law regulates the activity of public associations, private institutions, and foundations, which are the most widespread forms of CSOs in the country. The law limits arbitrary interference by authorities in the activity of CSOs, and expressly gives CSOs the right to express their views on the programs of political parties and socio-political organizations, as well as on electoral contestants and their programs. The law also stipulates that CSOs can receive funding from local and foreign sources and can generate income from all kinds of economic activities without receiving special permits. In addition, CSOs can now provide paid services for political parties and organization. The law also allows

companies to partner with individuals and CSOs to create new associative structures.

The law simplifies the registration process for these types of CSOs, reduces the period of registration from thirty to fifteen days, and eliminates all registration fees. However, CSOs still faced a number of bureaucratic impediments when attempting to register in 2020. For example, regional civil servants from PSA, the official governmental body in charge of overseeing the registration process, often made errors when attempting to implement the law, as they did not have clear instructions about the new registration procedures for CSOs. There were cases when PSA officials in the regions misled CSOs in the process of completing registration documentation or delayed their response to registration requests once they were filed.

The provisions of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations are not harmonized with certain provisions of the Tax Code. For example, the new law allows public associations, foundations, and private institutions to carry out any activity that is not prohibited by law, while the Tax Code exempts income only for those activities expressly indicated in the by-laws of the organization. For other activities, CSOs must pay income tax equal to 12 percent.

Following recommendations made by a working group established by the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and Environment (MARDE), amendments to Law 436 on Local Public Administration were also passed in 2020. These changes allow local public authorities (LPAs) to partner with CSOs and businesses to create Local Action Groups (LAGs), non-profit structures aimed at promoting local community development and implementing the European Union (EU) LEADER program.

In 2020, CSOs did not report any major cases of harassment by the state. However, some organizations engaged in litigation with public authorities. For example, local representatives of the State Chancellery sued the Association Centre for Social and Medical Home Assistance (CASMED) and the Falesti City Council after the Council agreed to co-finance a homecare and socio-medical project implemented by CASMED without the use of a competitive process. A decision is still pending. In case of an unfavorable decision, CASMED will be deprived of this funding, which may jeopardize the future of the project.

To limit the spread of COVID-19, the parliament declared a state of emergency and a state of emergency in public health that imposed several restrictions and limitations on the rights of assembly and association, freedom of movement, and the right of education. As a result, CSOs lacked the possibility to organize public meetings because initially, all assemblies, meetings, public demonstrations, and other mass actions were forbidden. Later, assemblies and public gatherings and protests up to fifty persons were permitted.

CSOs continue to be exempt from income tax if they meet the requirements specified in Article 52 of the Tax Code. Similar to companies, CSOs are responsible for paying value-added tax (VAT) if, during twelve consecutive months, they make sales of services and products of USD 67,000 or more.

Individuals may direct 2 percent of their taxable income to an accredited CSO. Businesses that make donations for philanthropic purposes to a CSO can, for tax purposes, only deduct up to 5 percent of their taxable income, thereby discouraging those economic agents that have little or no profits from making donations. Similarly, small non-VAT companies are deprived of the possibility to deduct donations made for philanthropic purposes from taxable income, as the standardized reporting forms do not allow such deductions to be included. In 2019, the Platform for the Development and Promotion of Philanthropy in the Republic of Moldova submitted a set of proposals to stimulate corporate donations. In 2020, these proposals were reviewed by the State Chancellery and several consultations were held with members of the Platform. In October 2020, the Platform submitted an additional set of proposals regarding philanthropy, which were being reviewed by the parliament and Ministry of Economy at the end of 2020.

The existing legal framework still allows CSOs to access funds from both public and private sources. CSOs can generate revenue from statutory economic activities, social entrepreneurship, and through the provision of social services to central and local public authorities. In 2020, amendments were introduced to Law 276 on Principles of Subsidizing Agricultural Producers that stipulate that 5 percent of the total budget of the National Agricultural and Rural Development Fund may be allocated to LAGs.

Local CSOs have access to various legal support programs. For example, in 2020, the CONTACT Center implemented a program through which legal and accounting support was provided to sixty CSOs located on the left and right banks of the Dniester.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.6

The organizational capacity of CSOs did not change in 2020.

The lockdown introduced by the government in March in response to the pandemic changed the intensity and form of interactions between CSOs and their beneficiaries. Some organizations made the switch to remote work relatively easily, while others were forced to suspend their activities, either because they or their beneficiaries lacked equipment or it was not feasible to move activities online. At the outset of the pandemic, a number of ad hoc, informal CSOs were created to respond immediately to public health needs, such as those supporting medical staff and vulnerable members of the population, including elderly and disabled persons. For example, by the end of the year, the Initiative Together Against Covid-19, which was created in March, had provided food and other necessary products to more than 8,000 beneficiaries with the support of over 500 volunteers.

Over the past two years, the development of LAGs has contributed to improvements in CSOs' interactions with beneficiaries. LAGs are expected to consult with local communities to ascertain their needs regarding community development, involve them in the decision-making processes, and then apply for grants to implement projects. By the end of 2020, thirty-two LAGs had been created, covering about 35 percent of the country's territory. The initiative plans to expand through 2022 and to support the development of an additional twenty-two structures. CSOs also continue to focus on strengthening their relationships with their constituents to persuade people to direct 2 percent of their owed income tax to them.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN MOLDOVA



Strategic planning processes were not a key priority for CSOs in 2020. As in previous years, CSOs initiated only a few strategic plans on their own. At the beginning of the year, promoting and supporting the strategic planning of CSOs remained a priority for funding organizations. However, donors' priorities quickly changed following the outbreak of the pandemic. For most organizations, adapting to the new working conditions imposed by the pandemic's restrictions took center stage. Many organizations, for example, had to develop remote decision-making processes, internal delegation plans, and oversight and accountability processes as they adjusted to the new environment.

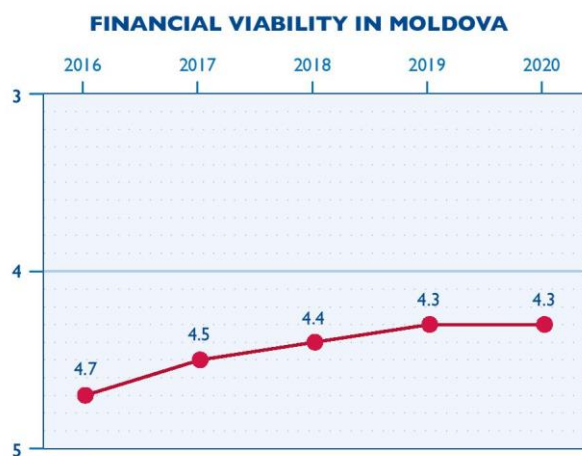
The adoption of the new Law on Non-Commercial Organizations introduced important changes to the internal management structures of public associations, foundations, and private institutions. As of 2020, these organizations are no longer required to have permanent governing bodies and control bodies, such as boards and audit committees. The new law requires only the presence of a general oversight body in the form of the founder of a private institution, the general assembly of members for a public association, and the council for a foundation. In addition to this body, the legislation stipulates the mandatory presence of an administrator, who may have the title of executive director, president, general secretary, or something else. These provisions apply to both newly registered and existing organizations.

The unprecedented situation imposed by COVID-19 also negatively affected CSO staffing, particularly among CSOs whose activities involve physical contact with their beneficiaries. Unable to collect the necessary resources, some CSOs accumulated debts to pay salaries or were forced to lay off staff. Organizations that have grants to cover salaries suffered less, as donors were generally flexible and allowed them to adjust planned activities to meet the conditions imposed by the pandemic. The government did not provide any financial support or compensation to those who lost their jobs, including those employed by CSOs. In 2020, with funding from the EU, IREX Europe launched a project to support organizations affected by the pandemic, which includes funding for core organizational costs, including salaries.

Volunteering also suffered from both travel and social distancing restrictions, so most CSO activities involving volunteers were transferred online. Fewer volunteer cards were issued in 2020 than in previous years; only 220 such cards were issued by CSOs, compared to 353 in 2019 and 312 in 2018. The Certification Commission of the host institutions of volunteering activities continued to accredit CSOs and public institutions that have developed volunteer programs in accordance with the legal framework and twenty entities were accredited/re-accredited in 2020, a similar number to the previous year.

In 2020, many CSOs were limited in their ability to operate due to the lack of technological equipment. Several donors launched technical support programs to help some CSOs overcome these problems. For example, the EU-funded IREX Europe program also offers support for the digitization of CSOs, including financial support to buy computers, video and audio equipment, subscriptions to remote communication platforms, etc. In addition, many organizations continued to benefit from preferential prices for licensed software through TechSoup Global, a nonprofit international network that provides technological tools to other nonprofits.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.3



The CSO sector's financial viability did not change significantly in 2020. According to a study conducted by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in November 2020, about 44 percent of the 300 CSOs surveyed said they anticipated a decline in revenue in 2020. However, the declines are not expected to be dramatic and will mostly be from sources other than grants, which account for the vast majority of CSO revenue.

Although there is no accurate information on the proportion of foreign grants in CSOs' reported annual budgets, the vast majority of research conducted in recent years estimates that such grants account for more than 70 percent of the annual revenues of registered organizations. Other sources of income include donations from individuals and companies, the 2 percent

individual donation scheme, and income from economic activity.

The ability of CSOs to raise funds through crowdsourcing has grown over the past few years. A new crowdfunding platform—www.particip.md—was created in 2020 that aims to support creative, community development, charitable, and capital investment projects. Platforms created in previous years, such as www.sprijina.md and www.caritate.md, also continued to operate. UNDP Moldova and the Swiss government actively support CSOs, especially local associations, in developing campaigns and raising money through crowdfunding. In 2020, approximately \$121,939 was collected by local associations (commonly known as hometown association in Moldova) through crowdfunding campaigns.

Government funding levels for CSOs did not change notably in 2020. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MERC) is the main public authority that provides funding for CSOs. In 2020, MERC awarded grants to twenty-three youth CSOs with a final total value of \$266,000; as the pandemic made it impossible to carry out some activities, the final grant amounts were slightly less than initially planned. No new programs were developed to support CSOs during the pandemic.

In 2020, some actions were taken to improve the process of funding CSOs from the public budget. According to the study *The Mechanism of Direct Financing of CSOs by the State: Realities and Options*, which was published in 2018 by Institutum Virtutes Civilis, public authorities should consult with CSOs more when setting funding priorities, ensure transparency in the process of selecting beneficiaries, and establish clearer rules regarding the launch of financing competitions. Based on this analysis, in 2020, Institutum Virtutes Civilis developed a framework regulation for the financing of projects of non-commercial organizations that all central and local public authorities can use as a model. The document is being reviewed by the State Chancellery and is expected to be approved in 2021.

As of 2020, LAGs can benefit from funding from the public budget. In February 2020, the government decided to allocate up to 5 percent of the National Agricultural and Rural Development Fund to finance LAGs beginning in 2022; funds will be allocated based on proposals from LAGs. From 2018 to 2020, Moldovan LAGs implemented 710 micro-projects with a total budget of approximately USD 2 million; these funds came from foreign donors, including the EU and USAID.

The primary foreign donors that provide support to CSOs are the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the EU, the Swedish Embassy, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and United Nations agencies. USAID, for instance, spent \$2.8 million in 2020 for civil society. The main funding methods are grant competitions and tenders. Donors generally took a flexible approach to their existing grantees, allowing them to adapt their projects to the new circumstances stemming from the pandemic.

The number of individual taxpayers who redirected 2 percent of their income tax to CSOs decreased from 34,066 in 2019 to 26,776 in 2020. As a result, the total revenue collected through this mechanism in 2020 was EUR 65,000 less than what was collected in 2019. The main reason for this decrease was likely the restrictions on

movement imposed by the pandemic, which resulted in fewer people going to the tax service to submit their annual income tax forms, thereby limiting the number of people who redirected 2 percent of their taxes to CSOs.

CSOs can generate income from economic activity on their own or by creating social enterprises. The first four social enterprises were officially accredited in Moldova in June 2020. According to the catalogue of social enterprises, however, there are forty-eight social entrepreneurship initiatives, of which thirty-one (63 percent) are CSOs; the rest are limited liability companies. According to data from the *Baseline Report in Republic of Moldova* that was prepared for the project EU4Youth, approximately 50 percent of social entrepreneurship initiatives are categorized as active, 21 percent as start-ups, and 29 percent as inactive or no longer functioning. Although no concrete data is available, social entrepreneurship and CSOs' economic activity are thought to have been dramatically reduced as a result of the pandemic.

The majority of CSOs, particularly regional CSOs, do not have sound financial management systems in place and do not operate transparently. Few CSOs publish annual financial reports with financial statements and less than a third of CSOs have submitted financial statements to the authorities, although they are legally required to do so. External audits are usually performed only within large projects funded by foreign donors. CSOs generally present reports in accordance with conditions and provisions in their funding contracts.

ADVOCACY: 3.1

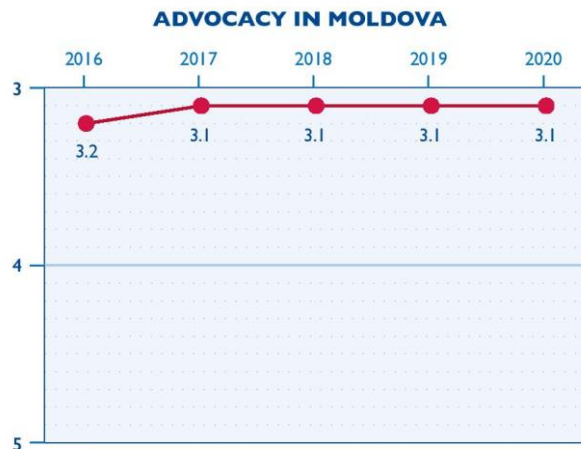
CSO advocacy did not change in 2020. Collaboration between civil society and public authorities was characterized more by ad hoc partnership activities to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic than by a prepared, structured, and agreed-upon advocacy agenda.

Currently, there is no unique platform for civil society to present its interests to the state. The National Participation Council (NPC) was an advisory structure created by the government to promote the participation of CSOs in joint decision making with state institutions, but it is no longer active. Its resuscitation is no longer considered a priority either by CSOs or the government because the mechanism had been unable to ensure effective and full participation of all members of civil society. In addition, most CSOs prefer to monitor their own areas of interest separately and to respond or intervene when necessary.

The NGO Council remains the primary representative structure of CSOs in Moldova and is the one most often consulted by the authorities. It is a national platform that monitors laws that impact CSOs and claims to facilitate collaboration with the government, although it does not have a sufficiently legitimate mandate to assume representation of the entire sector. The government occasionally creates new consultative structures; these are typically docile and only mimic the participation of CSOs in decision-making processes. The former Moldovan president attempted in 2017 to create such a body when he established the Civil Society Council, which consisted of CSOs led by people close to him and the ruling Socialist Party at that time; it ceased to exist in 2020.

The National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, an associative structure consisting of ninety-two CSOs that promotes Moldova's European integration, has been particularly active in recent years. In December 2020, the platform presented its advocacy plan for the next two years which contains several objectives related to European integration and the democratic development of Moldova. The presentation meeting was attended by President Maia Sandu, who expressed her support for the proposed objectives.

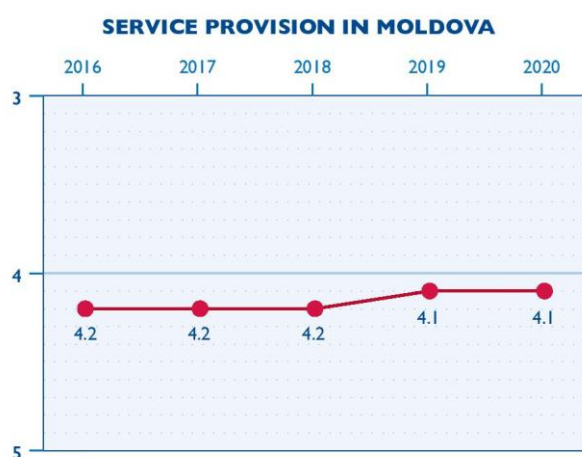
In 2020, several public policy initiatives launched in previous years resulted in positive achievements. One example is the success of the initiative to regulate the status and functioning of LAGs. The initiative was submitted by the National LEADER Network of the Republic of Moldova and the Solidarity Fund PL Foundation in Moldova. As a result of their efforts, several important amendments were made to Law 436 on Local Public Administration, including the ability for LPAs to partner with CSOs and the business sector in forming LAGs.



Lobbying is not regulated by law. However, there are cases when CSOs communicate directly with policy makers, resulting in positive achievements. For example, the National LEADER Network has developed very good personal connections with the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry that facilitated the work mentioned above.

As a result of a three-year advocacy process led by CSOs and the active involvement and pressure of foreign donors, the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations was finally approved during its final reading in June 2020. A group of CSOs led by Legal Resource Center from Moldova (LRCM) issued a public appeal which was signed by over forty organizations requesting the approval of the law in the version previously developed in consultation with CSOs, without including amendments that could negatively affect the activities and functioning of non-profit organizations. Meanwhile, donors stated that they would withhold EU support and other funding that was to be allocated to the public budget if the law was not passed in full.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.1



CSO service provision remained largely unchanged in 2020.

CSOs provided a wide range of services to beneficiaries, but the overall volume of services provided is still small. The fields of education, legal aid, entrepreneurship, institutional development, social assistance, and home health care are the key areas in which CSOs provide services. With the approval of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations, CSOs are now able to provide monitoring services for political activities and services for political parties.

With the onset of the pandemic, CSOs and citizens mobilized to collect money and food for medical staff, hospitals, and socially vulnerable people. The Initiative Together Against COVID-19 delivered about 8,000 hot

meals to the elderly and vulnerable people. The Diaconia Religious Mission developed several partnerships enabling it to donate food packages to the elderly and vulnerable population worth about \$29,000. Public Association Moldova-AID offered 500 face shields and 2,000 liters of anti-bacterial soap to the Emergency Medical Institute, and also helped raise about \$55,000 to buy ventilators and other necessary medical equipment. Several CSOs produced masks and breathing equipment for medical staff, and donated disinfectants, gloves, masks, and other products needed to fight the pandemic.

To identify needs, CSOs usually approach beneficiaries directly or carry out various surveys, analyses, or research in the field. An example of this is the *Report on the Mechanisms for Accreditation, Contracting, and Financing of Social Services*, which was published in December 2020 by the Institutum Virtutes Civilis at the request of the Alliance of NGOs active in the field of Social Protection of Children and Families (APSCF). The report presents information about the status of the current accreditation system and whether it meets the service needs of the population. Although some CSOs conduct surveys and research to identify the needs of their beneficiaries, several experts in the field note that the resulting reports are not sufficiently detailed.

CSOs, especially local and mutual interest groups, strive to provide services tailored to the needs of beneficiaries and constituents. They increasingly develop their in-house and advocacy skills by hiring experts and trainers to provide quality services for beneficiaries. Besides training and consulting services, think tanks and larger CSOs also develop research and analytical tools in their fields of activity to better gauge their constituents' needs. These tools and reports are usually distributed and offered to other organizations, beneficiaries, authorities, and academia free of charge. In general, CSOs provide services without discrimination to all interested beneficiaries.

According to several studies conducted in 2020, including ones conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and CASMED for the Northern Development Region, the revenues received by CSO from service provision constitute only about 10 percent of their total revenue. As in previous years, a large portion of the costs for services

delivered by CSOs to beneficiaries continued to be covered by foreign donors. In many cases, LPAs co-finance these services, but the amounts allocated by them are insufficient to cover the full amount needed. This is because about 80 percent of LPAs are not financially viable and sometimes, the authorities are not interested in continuing to these services. For example, in the Dubasari district, the authorities decided not to continue financing two services provided by CSOs, arguing that they are not useful to the population even if the beneficiaries stated otherwise.

The legislation stipulates that social service providers must be accredited every five years in order to deliver services to beneficiaries and to receive contracts from the public authorities. The accreditation process is both difficult and unclear. For example, current regulations regarding public procurement procedures and public-private partnerships are not adapted to the field of social service contracting or the specificities of non-profit providers. According to the *Report on the Mechanisms for Accreditation, Contracting, and Financing of Social Services*, about half of social service providers do not want to be accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Social Service Providers (NCASSP) and continue to provide services without accreditation.

Despite CSOs' contributions during the pandemic, the government's recognition of CSO services did not change in 2020. Neither central or local public authorities showed particular interest in supporting the development of new CSO social services.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.1

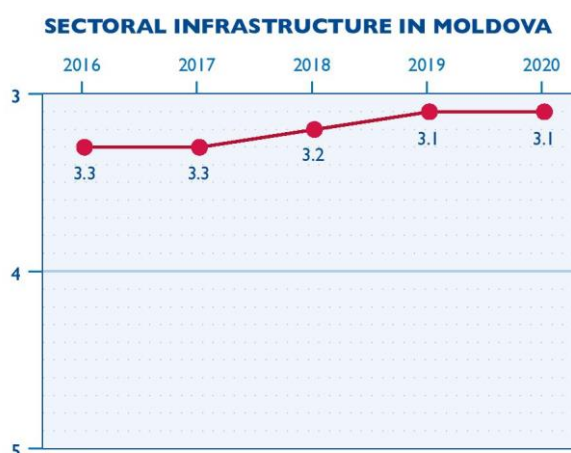
The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector did not change notably in 2020.

Support and resource centers continued to provide information and technical assistance to CSOs from Chisinau and other regions. Some of the most active national resource organizations are CONTACT Center and the Center for Organizational Consultancy and Training (CICO). Outside the capital, the most active organizations include Pro Regional Cooperation (ProCoRe), CASMED (for the Northern region), CONTACT Center Cahul (for the South), and the European Center Pro Europa (for ATU Gagauzia). Solidarity Fund PL and the National LEADER Network are the most active and important organizations involved in building the capacity of LAGs. All these organizations

offer a full range of services such as information, mentoring, training, and consulting services. They also periodically launch grants programs to develop organizational capacity and support local initiatives. Although these organizations provide active support for CSOs, their functionality largely depends on foreign funding.

Local funding and grantmaking capacity both continue to grow. During 2020, there were several funding opportunities and programs for regional and local CSOs. For example, in March, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung launched the second call of the Development of Local Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova grant program, which is funded by the EU. More than 80 percent of the approximately EUR 1 million budget was distributed to regional and local projects. In the Northern region, ProCoRe in partnership with CASMED provided grants to twenty-five CSOs through the project Engaging Citizens and Civil Society in Decision-Making and Sustainable Local Development, which is funded by the EU and implemented by GIZ. The total amount of the local grants program was EUR 750,000.

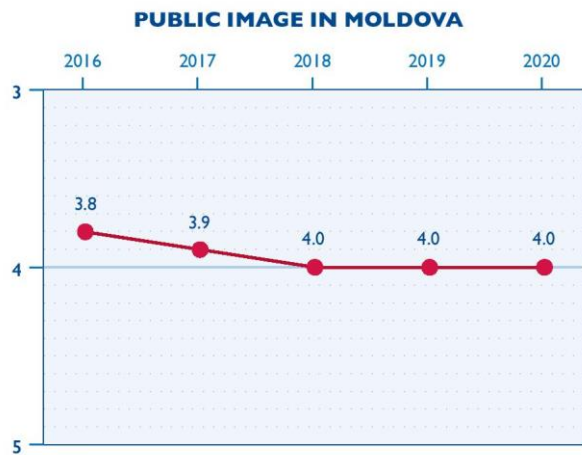
The NGO Council and the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum remain the most representative and active platforms of CSOs in Moldova. In December, the NGO Forum—the general assembly of the NGO Council—was organized and new board members were elected for the NGO Council. In addition to existing networks and platforms, new structures have been created. For example, in August, CSOs in the Northern region launched the Platform for Health Cooperation (CORES) to strengthen the collaboration of CSOs working in the field of health care and promoting social responsibility.



Donors funded multiple training and support programs for CSOs during the year. For example, CASMED in partnership with ProCoRe launched a training and consulting program for twenty-five northern-based CSOs on financial management, human resources management, good governance, and communication and visibility. CONTACT Center Cahul launched a training program and platform for CSOs which included several training courses on five relevant topics related to the activity of CSOs entitled Online School for CSOs. In recent years, however, CSOs have become less interested in the training programs offered to them. This is due to the fact that some CSOs face few challenges in functioning at a low level of institutional development, and the training often does not include a practical approach. After CSOs adjusted to the new situation created by the pandemic, they started to organize online trainings. However, these activities were deemed to be less effective, and many capacity-building organizations mentioned that it is more difficult to facilitate these meetings and keep participants engaged.

CSOs have registered little progress regarding collaboration with other sectors. The most important successes are related to the collaboration within LAGs. The thirty-two existing LAGs involve over 1,200 public, associative, and business organizations. In 2020, the Solidarity Fund PL in Moldova in collaboration with the National LEADER Network launched the call for proposals Initiatives for the Creation of Local Action Groups, which is focused on the expansion of the existing network and the creation of seven new LAGs.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.0



The public image of CSOs did not change significantly in 2020.

CSOs' presence in the media increased in 2020, largely due to new regulations that oblige national media organizations to provide at least ten hours of local media content. Therefore, the media increasingly invite CSO representatives to take part in television talk shows to comply with the existing legal provisions. On the other hand, CSOs are losing interest in the traditional media, while they are more proactively promoting themselves online, and by engaging with civic journalists, vloggers, influencers, and other resources on their social networks.

The level of public trust in CSOs is increasing. According to two separate Public Opinion Barometers, the number

of people with absolute confidence and some confidence in CSOs increased from 19 percent of those polled in December 2019 to 29.3 percent in June 2020. However, the confidence rate then decreased in October 2020 to 23.1 percent. This significant variation may indicate either decreased confidence in CSOs or a data management error, given that data for the various editions of the barometer were collected by different companies and surveyed different segments of the population.

Although the image of CSOs seems to be improving, the population still does not discern between the different types and composition of organizations or the socio-economic functions they perform. Despite this, according to the October 2020 Public Opinion Barometer, CSOs benefit from greater trust compared to other actors such as government (23.2 percent), the justice sector (19 percent), parliament (15.5 percent), and the general prosecutor's office (18.5 percent). Although no official surveys were done regarding the public perception of CSOs during COVID, beneficiaries were generally appreciative of the services they received from CSOs during the pandemic.

In 2020, the government did not show much openness to civil society. Throughout the year, several politicians and officials launched verbal attacks on CSOs. A member of parliament from the Socialist Party (PSRM) published a book in October, which presented information in such a way as to defame active CSOs and foreign donors, and to cast conspiratorial theories on their activities.

The commercial sector maintains a relatively good view of CSOs, and the pandemic has played a strong role in solidifying solidarity between businesses and CSOs providing important social services to the community. The business community also perceives CSOs as important resources for addressing common problems and in

providing advocacy platforms to raise issues of joint concern. With the adoption of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations, businesses can now become members of CSOs alongside individuals and non-commercial organizations. This could further improve collaboration between businesses and CSOs.

In 2020, due to the pandemic, CSOs focused their public relations and promotional activities on the online environment. According to the study conducted by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the communication channels most used by CSOs include Facebook pages (used by 81.5 percent of the 300 CSOs surveyed), organizational websites (used by 51.3 percent), and Viber groups (used by 39.7 percent). A study conducted for the Northern Development Region by CASMED had similar results, finding that about 70 percent of CSOs have at least one Facebook page and about 30 percent have webpages.

According to the provisions of the new Law on Non-Commercial Organizations, CSOs are required to submit annual activity reports, which were previously mandatory only for public utility CSOs. If CSOs are not able to publish their reports, then they must send a copy to any entity or individual who requests it within a month. Annual reports must include information on the activities carried out, the value of the financial means and materials obtained and used, as well as other relevant information. This will significantly improve the transparency of CSO activity.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*