EU ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN GEORGIA

2018 – 2024 (updated in 2021)

December 2021

List of abbreviations

CfP – Call for Proposals
CEC – Central Election Commission
CSOs – Civil Society Organisations
CSO/LA – EU funded thematic programme Civil Society Organisations/Local Authorities
CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility
DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DEVCO – Development Cooperation Directorate of the European Commission
DCG – Donor Co-ordination Group
EEAS – European External Action Service
EIDHR – European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI – European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENPARD – European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
EUD – European Union Delegation
EVET – Employment and Vocational Education Training
GNP – Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
GoG – Government of Georgia
IDPs – Internally Displaced Persons
LA – Local Authority
MS – Member State
NALA – National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
NHRSAP – National Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan
NGOs – Non-Governmental Organisations
NSA/LA – EU-funded thematic programme Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development
OGP – Open Government Partnership
SRC – Sector Reform Contract
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
VET – Vocational Education and Training

Executive Summary (covering 2018-2020)

An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and is an asset in itself. Civil society participation in public policy processes fosters pluralism and can contribute to policies that are more effective, equitable and sustainable. Amongst others, civil society is also a watchdog over state actors, which becomes even more important when a ruling party holds a large majority. Therefore, support to and engagement with civil society in all of its diversity is an essential part of the EU's external relations.

The EU has been supporting Georgian civil society since its early development and will continue to do so in the future, both financially and politically, through defending and promoting the crucial role it plays in a democratic society.

The first Roadmap for the EU engagement with the Civil Society covered the period 2014-2017 and ensured broader EU engagement with civil society, providing clarity and predictability of the EU's country-specific actions. The Roadmap set out three main general priority areas for support (improvement of the enabling framework, supporting the CSOs involvement in policy dialogue and capacity development) which remain valid also now. The Roadmap addressed the problem of weak civic participation, with the particular aim to build capacity, linkages, experience and accountability, as well as to strengthen links between CSOs throughout Georgia.

The EU's goal remains to enhance the sustainability and accountability of CSOs as well as to ensure an enabling environment, improved policy dialogue between civil society and public institutions (especially with regard to budgetary and legislative processes) and stronger civic participation in all regions of Georgia. EU support also aims at developing civil society's capacity to be involved in all sectors covered by the Association Agenda.

The EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society for 2018-2020 described the then status of civil society in Georgia, reviewed priorities set out in the period covered by the former Roadmap and set out new priority areas of future engagement along a sectoral approach based on the four Riga priorities[1]. The Roadmap was the result of EU Delegation and EU Member States' input, comprehensive consultations with civil society organizations in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Telavi (the latter two representing two of the four focal regions[2] in the relevant EU programming exercise) and also through online consultations, as well as external assessments of indicators and of the enabling environment for civil society.

Since the implementation of the 2014-2017 Roadmap, EU support to civil society has been and will continue to be mainstreamed in all EU assistance programmes. Relations between the EU Delegation and EU Member States on one side, and CSOs on the other side, are based on mutual trust and include both financial and political support. Consultations take place regularly, in a formalized format for certain policy dialogues as well as ad-hoc on other measures and topics. Participation of CSOs in policy and decision-making has increased and is more systematic, including at local levels. However, many mechanisms are still not fully used, while others require further institutionalisation. Further capacity building is essential to consolidate the culture of participatory approach. Trust needs to be re-built following the recent fall-outs between certain civil society organizations and some state institutions.

Capacity building for CSOs remains a permanent requirement for their development and sustainability, both on project management issues as well as on topics that are more technical.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/near-eeas_joint_swd_2016467_0.pdf
[2] The focal regions for deepened EU engagement are Kacheti, Racha-Lechkumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Imereti and Guria.

Networking and coalition building also remain credible and effective ways of participation in policy-making and development.

Finally, diversification of funding remains a priority, with innovative ways required for fund raising and partnership building with the private sector. A state funding concept should be considered, with increased transparency and predictability of the programmes; that could then allow some shift from predominantly donor driven actions to more specialised expertise of the CSOs. A variety of non-state funding mechanisms exist, such as individual and corporate donations, membership-based systems, individual and corporate volunteering, social entrepreneurship, cross-sector cooperation, community foundations, and social investments, but they are only marginally used.

The Roadmap for EU engagement with Civil Society for 2018-2020 sets out the following priority areas[3], along the four Riga priorities:

General EU engagement with civil society – cross cutting topics
Priority 1: Provide wide-ranging capacity building for CSOs to perform multiple roles, in particular to engage in policy dialogues, act as watchdogs and as social entrepreneurs

Economic development and market opportunities
Priority 2 – Increase CSOs engagement in a more balanced and sustainable territorial development, including agriculture, rural development and food safety
Priority 3 – Enhance CSOs involvement in the promotion of the DCFTA's practical benefits at all levels of society

Connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change
Priority 4 – Support CSOs in promoting energy efficiency, as well as the road safety and air quality, measures, and monitoring their implementation

Strengthening institutions and good governance
Priority 5 – Increase CSOs participation in the reform of the public administration and security sectors
Priority 6 – Support CSOs promoting and defending human rights

Mobility and People-to-People contacts
Priority 7: Increase CSOs engagement in skills development for employment and matching for labour market needs (EVET), as well as youth and culture

As a general recommendation, EU and EU Member States general and thematic assistance should include or mainstream elements supporting CSOs' involvement to complement stand-alone CSOs programs that cannot on their own develop an effective policy dialogue between CSOs and GoG and a strong civil society.

[3] The priorities have been updated for the period 2021-2024. Please see Part II of the Roadmap.

PART I – BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT AND PAST EU ENGAGEMENT[4]

I.1 THE STATE OF CS BEFORE 2018

Recent trends

Recent research suggests a relatively low level of trust towards civil society organisations (CSOs) in Georgia. Data from Caucasus Resource Research Centre (CRRC)'s Caucasus Barometer[5] reveals that between 2008-2017 Georgians' trust in CSOs decreased from 35% to 23%[6]. An EU-funded study confirmed that citizens of Georgia have inconsistent attitudes towards CSOs. Meanwhile only 2% think that CSOs should not exist, around 50% believe that CSOs have a positive impact on the development of Georgia. On the other hand, many think that the Georgian government does not need to consider the stances of CSOs or that the government should control CSOs' work. Those who trust the EU reveal more positive attitudes towards CSOs.[7]

Enabling environment

Civil society in Georgia continues to benefit from a nonthreatening enabling environment in terms of legal and regulatory aspects. Registration of new CSOs is an easy and non-bureaucratic process, simple, fast and efficient. There are more than 26,000 "non-profit, non-commercial" organizations formally registered in Georgia, a country of just 3.7 million, but much fewer are active. It is difficult however to estimate the exact number of functional and financially viable CSOs, not least as the extremely complicated liquidation procedures discourage defunct organizations from closing. The majority of well-developed CSOs are concentrated in the capital city, Tbilisi, while regional CSOs capacities continue to be limited. Some watchdog groups have highlighted a steep increase in the number of registrations of CSOs in Georgia in the past year.

CSOs are able to function freely regardless of their activities or the opinions they express. The constitution guarantees the right of citizens to form associations and CSOs operate free of state control. Georgia's legal framework protects CSOs against unwarranted intervention in their activities. However, public statements directed against watchdog CSOs occurred with increasing frequency in the second half of 2018. This peaked during the electoral campaign period for the Presidential elections 2018 when CSOs were harshly confronted by members of parliament and government officials and accused of being politically biased and partisan after they had criticized the way the campaigns were taking place. Following the Mukhtarli case in June 2017, there also have been some concerns on Georgia as "safe haven" for foreign human rights activists.

The Parliament has been developing a state concept for civil society since 2015, but this has not been adopted by December 2018.

Numerous coordination mechanisms exist for government-civil society consultations. Their functioning has improved but sizable space for improvement remains. CSOs based in Tbilisi play a strong role in advocating and lobbying for human rights and governance issues, whereas CSOs at the regional and community levels tend to be more focused on service provision (education,

[4] Part I.4 includes an assessment of the 2018-2020 period as well as recommendations for implementation for 2021-2024
[5] Caucasus Resource Research Centre - http://www.crrccenters.org/2; Caucasus Barometer - http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/datasets/
[6] http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/TRUNGOS/
7 Attitudes of the Population of Georgia towards Civil Society Organisations, European Integration and Business Entities, 2018.

social, healthcare and community development). A number of well-resourced CSOs have international roots, working to support the continued development of civil society in Georgia.

The Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum comprises 185 members and organises regular meetings with the government as part of a structured dialogue process. Not all leading CSOs are members anymore, reflecting divergent views within the CSOs community. Part of this divide comes from the fact that those CSOs promoting human rights and good governance are more exposed to disagreements with the government whom they try to hold accountable; on the other hand, the CSOs more active in the regions and focused more on service provision exercise less of a role of watchdog therefore are less likely to enter into rows with the Government (but still face difficulties with local authorities).

Early 2014 also saw the adoption of the National Human Rights Strategy of Georgia 2014-2020[8]. This was a landmark publication complying with international standards. The strategy provides numerous entry points for civil society to reinforce the observance of human rights in Georgia.

In 2016, Georgia was elected co-chair and then chair in 2018 of the Open Government Partnership (OGP)[9] - a multilateral initiative that promotes transparency, empowers citizens, and strengthens governance through CSOs-government collaboration. Local CSOs are actively involved in the OGP process and CSOs participation is organized through the national coordination mechanism, the Open Government Georgia Forum, co-chaired by a CSO on a rotating basis. Accomplishments so far include the development of community centers, increased transparency and impartiality in public service recruitment, the introduction of political party financial declarations, growing public awareness of the electoral process, and increased efficiency and transparency of the public finance management system. In addition, surveillance data has been published on the website of the Supreme Court of Georgia[10], as effect of OGP commitment. However, Georgia has made less progress on other commitments, including e-petitions, reform of freedom of information legislation, and access to government data. On 1 November 2018, seven CSOs suspended their participation because, in their view, their main recommendation to establish an independent anti-corruption agency was not included in the new OGP action plan 2018-2019, and the consultation process for the Action Plan did not allow sufficient time for CSOs' feedback.

With regard to the **breakaway regions**, after the 2008 war and the recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, a new reality emerged for the CSOs operating in these regions. The environment is restrictive and CSOs seen as not following the *de facto* local authorities' line are subject to pressure, with pro-democracy groups especially singled out. In August 2013, South Ossetia amended its CSOs laws, requiring the groups to provide information to the government about the source of their funding and adopted a 'foreign agents law' similar to the one in Russia. This is not the case in Abkhazia and a number of active CSOs can operate, mainly on humanitarian, social and legal issues.

Organisational and financial sustainability

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[8] http://myrights.gov.ge/en/About%20us/news/reports/About%20us/news/My%20Rights/Briefly%20on%20Human%20Rights/About%20us/My%20Rights/useful-links/Policy%20Documents/National%20Human%20Rights%20Strategy/; http://myrights.gov.ge/uploads/file-manager/HR_STRATEGYENG.pdf

[9] OGP Global Summit 2018: Tbilisi- https://www.opengovpartnership.org/events/ogp-global-summit-2018-tbilisi;

[10] http://www.supremecourt.ge/eng?q=+telephone+surveillance+&x=0&y=0

The majority of CSOs present clear mission and vision. However, they often do not engage in strategic planning as they lack the necessary resources, incentives, and skills to do so. In addition, strategic planning is inhibited by CSOs' dependence on foreign donor funding and the fast-changing operational context, especially in regions where CSOs face greater institutional and financial challenges. Financial viability continues to be a challenge for regional organizations, due to limited access to funding, networks, qualified professionals, limited familiarity with foreign call for proposals and other critical resources. Those urban financially stable CSOs can afford to offer the competitive salaries needed to attract and retain good staff. Regional CSOs, on the other hand, struggle with frequent gaps in funding that make it difficult for them to compete on the labor market.

The majority of **donors** prioritize program and activity funding over institutional strengthening. Limited access to institutional funding and organizational development opportunities produces an unhealthy dependence on what local CSOs refer to as "traditional donors." It also undermines CSOs' potential for constituency building and makes them more donor-driven. Donors normally solicit local CSOs input when determining funding priorities and CSOs normally have long adopted participatory approaches to program planning, in which they should actively involve their constituencies in both program design and implementation. In general, however, CSOs and the public believe that local organizations have a limited say in the selection of areas to be covered by future donor funding.

According to the 2016 CSO Sustainability Index (USAID)[11] the legal environment governing civil society is generally favourable, although it does not provide sufficient incentives or mechanisms to support CSO **sustainability**. Despite continuous lobbying efforts by CSOs — both individually and in coalitions — the legal environment has not changed significantly in recent years. More recently, the discussion on sustainability has been focusing on the need to increase the level of national public funding channelled through civil society organizations.

Despite the efforts of several CSOs and donors, only a limited number of social enterprises have developed in Georgia so far, partly due to the lack of an enabling legal environment.

CSOs can receive funds from international and national donors and government agencies. Private donations are limited due to absence of legislation.

An EU-funded study conducted in 2017 on **state funding** for CSOs in Georgia identified numerous state grant mechanisms to CSOs underpinned by several laws.[12] The study describes the legal framework, funding amount and grant mechanisms, as well as provides an overview of rather fragmented and even unknown information on public funding to CSOs in Georgia. This study has been used to stimulate discussions within the sector on ways to improve the legal and economic aspects of current public funding mechanisms. However, this study did not address the possible implications of public funding of the sector. In 2018 new study on "Public Financing of Civil Society Organizations: Considerations for Georgia" [13] was commissioned by the Europe Foundation supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Danish International Development Cooperation. The study revealed a number of gaps and

[11] https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CSOSI_Report_7-28-17.pdf
[12] State Funding for CSOs - https://civilin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/State_Funding_Mechanisms_for_CSOs_in_Georgia_GEO.pdf (CSI, 2017)
[13] 2018 new study on "Public Financing of Civil Society Organizations: Considerations for Georgia"- http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Report-CSO-Public-Funding-Final.pdf

deficiencies that need to be addressed.

State funding continues to grow as a source of income for CSOs, a positive trend that began a few years ago when selected state agencies were authorised to award grants to CSOs. The list of authorized government offices is growing, yet the scale and scope of funding is still insufficient to significantly improve the sustainability of the sector. According to the Civil Society Institute (CSI), the state funding system lacks uniform legislative standards. Although the Law on Grants[14] does not allow local governments to award grants, local governments can award "program funding" to CSOs, which is technically identical to state grants. It is desirable for local CSOs that local governments be granted the legal authority to award grants as well. According to the data collected by CSI, the municipality of Tbilisi allocated GEL 3,126,250 (approximately EUR 1,150,000) to CSOs in 2017. Non-financial support from the local governments, such as the city hall providing premises for CSOs, could also be made more transparent and available.

Some government agencies, especially health and education offices, outsource different services to CSOs. The overall scope of these partnerships remains limited and does not affect the sustainability of the sector. In addition, many CSOs remain reluctant to accept funding from state sources, fearing that doing so will limit their ability to act independently, as well as damage public perception of them as independent actors.

A variety of **non-state funding mechanisms** exist, such as individual and corporate donations, individual and corporate volunteering, social entrepreneurship, cross-sector cooperation, community foundations, and social investments. A low level of popularity of these non-state funding mechanisms leads in practice to very limited use of such alternative funding sources.

The legislation related to CSOs funding is generally favourable but still needs some adjustments. The Civil Code of Georgia and other sectoral laws allow CSOs to apply various forms of non-state funding. The Law of Georgia on Volunteering[15], adopted by the Parliament in 2016, notably simplifies the use of volunteer work by CSOs. The Tax Code of Georgia[16] generally does not differentiate between CSOs and business companies, but envisages preferential mechanisms for receiving and giving non-state funding. Nevertheless, the analysis of non-state funding mechanisms reveals the need for amending Georgian legislation and developing a state strategy; the experience of other countries however prove that legislative changes alone are not sufficient to change the practice – a concerted effort of the state is required to encourage individual and corporate charity. Public discussions on the limited but important role of individual and corporate charity should be launched.

The limited popularity of non-state funding mechanisms lies partly with CSOs themselves, as Georgian CSOs have not thoroughly considered establishing membership-based systems and thus closer ties with the population. This is a result of massive dependence on international financial assistance since 1992. Consequently, studies show that a large segment of CSOs is not perceived as accountable to citizens.

Relationship between businesses and CSOs is yet another challenge. According to the CSO

[14] https://mof.ge/images/File/laws/B-Law-Law-on-Grants-ENG.pdf
[15] Law of Georgia on Volunteering 2016- https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/3132612/0/en/pdf ;
[16] TAX Code of Georgia- https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/1043717/93/en/pdf

Sustainability Index[17], businesses perceive CSOs as politicized institutions and avoid cooperation with CSOs fearing tensions with the government. On the other hand, according to the most recent survey of CRRC[18], only 20 out of 282 surveyed CSOs accepted business donation. A number of CSOs refuse to accept business donations, as they believe that businesses pursue only corporate interests. Still this relationship is essential for CSOs in order to understand benefits of collaboration in economic development and increased business climate and entrepreneurship as well as to develop a good understanding of where and how to engage in various policies, such as EVET.

Philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) remain underdeveloped in Georgia. Only 8% of 568 surveyed business companies have implemented any type of project in cooperation with CSOs, while one fifth are not even aware of the concept. Current legislation does not provide sufficient incentives to encourage philanthropy and civil society is itself divided on the best means to approach this issue. Although the last two Human Rights Action Plans include a chapter on corporate social responsibility, the concept is still nascent. It is hampered by the tendency of companies to support short term charity initiatives with high public relations value but low sustainability on the one hand, and the inability, as yet, of CSOs to package their initiatives in a style that would appeal to the private sector. Awareness raising among the business community on what corporate social responsibility means in the broader sense would be helpful. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)[19] can be a further driver, as companies will have to meet certain standards in fields relevant to corporate social responsibility, such as labour safety standards.

Only a handful of developed organizations are membership-based and collect membership fees.

Policy Dialogue

Georgian civil society has proven to be instrumental in the democratic development of the country. There are a growing number of civil society platforms, an important one being the Georgian National Platform (GNP)[20] of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum[21]. In 2016 the GNP established four regional branches: Imereti, Samtskhe Javakheti, Shida Kartli and Samegrelo. CSOs in the agriculture sector participate in the Georgian Alliance for Agriculture and Rural Development (GAARD)[22], a national civil society platform (established with EU support) which aims to empower rural communities, particularly smallholder farmers, and to reinforce their capacities for representing their interests in policy development and its implementation process. GAARD provides a platform for discussion and coordination to facilitate collaborative action amongst government and local stakeholders, such as local civil society actors, small farmers, vulnerable groups, etc. The enabling environment for CSOs in agriculture appears to be rather good, with the presence of a number of larger international CSOs often establishing effective partnerships with smaller local CSOs.

The Open Parliament Partnership was a successful example of partnership between the state and

[17] CSO Sustainability Index- https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CSOSI_Report_7-28-17.pdf;
[18] CSO Sustainability Index - https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-civil-society-organization-2017-regional-report.PDF (CRRC 2018)
[19] DCFTA - http://www.dcfta.gov.ge/en/home
[20] http://www.ei-lat.ge/g-pac.html?lang=en-GB
[21] https://eap-csf.eu/national-platforms/
[22] http://www.bridge.org.ge/en/projects/gaard

CSOs. According to the parliament's 2017 annual activity report, it fully implemented thirteen and partially implemented eleven out of twenty-four commitments described in the Open Parliament Action Plan 2017. The Parliament is making certain efforts in engaging more with civil society, but these efforts need to be strengthened.

Civil society stakeholders are members of the National Vocational Education and Training (VET) Council[23], the main consultative body in VET. The CSOs are involved in a policy dialogue on the VET strategy and Action; some of them are monitoring its implementation. In addition, CSOs were members of the EVET Council, established for steering the EU-Georgia Employment and VET (EVET) budget support programme within the framework of the four grant projects funded under the Grant Scheme of the EU–funded **EVET Programme**. A very good cooperation has been established with international and national CSOs, involved in a regular (every 6-month) monitoring of the grant scheme projects implementation. With the facilitation from the EU the CSOs have well established working relationships with the line ministries as line ministries representatives have been also involved in the monitoring process. However, there is a need for increasing CSOs engagement in the education polices development and monitoring process.

With regard to labour market, there is a positive trend of CSOs participation in policy making, which is further strengthened by the EU funded Skills4Job programme. The sensitivity of the law on Occupational Health and Safety activated many players and put it at the top of agenda of some generic CSOs and those working on human rights. It is to note the progress achieved in improving the legislative framework as regards judicial system and access to labour market, as well as ongoing public discussions on these changes. In the future, the Government and the Parliament as well as other state bodies shall be further encouraged to involve more CSOs in this process.

Also, a well-developed network of CSOs active in health sector, in particular HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and other public health related topics, including trainings in primary healthcare, is active in the country.

Civil Society has been very vocal on issues relating to democracy, justice and human rights. Reacting to actual developments on a regular basis, CSOs issue statements calling relevant institutions such as Parliament and its committees and government institutions for certain actions. They act as watchdogs over state institutions and trigger political discussions or remind of outstanding issues. Frequently, surveys and research are conducted by civil society organizations, which facilitate evidence-based discussions.

Many CSOs are engaged in human rights topics, submit alternative (shadow) reports and take part in sessions of international mechanisms when reports are discussed. They have been actively involved in developing the National Human Rights Strategy and its Action Plans (NHRSAP) and in monitoring, however not in a fully established methodology and procedures. Officially, several CSOs are represented in the Human Rights Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, which could be a valuable forum to discuss the NHRSAP implementation, monitoring and other developments. However, this Council has not convened since 2015.

CSOs made significant advances in making their voices heard as they engaged and often shaped national discussions on some of the most critical topics in the country. For example, public debate in Georgia in 2017 was focused on the country's strict drug prohibition laws, justice reforms,

[23] https://bit.ly/2E1k5S4

freedom of the press, constitutional and local government reforms and extreme air pollution, among other national topics.

A large number of civil society organizations are very active in the justice sector, and in particular in the judiciary area. A Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary gathers 40 CSOs, led by the most prominent ones. These CSOs have been very outspoken and critical about the judiciary reforms at times.

There have been emerging attempts by CSOs to engage with the Parliament and the Government on the promotion of an enabling environment for Social Enterprises. Policy dialogue on this topic with the government is however slowed down by the fact that no specific ministry has an overall mandate to coordinate policies on Social Entrepreneurship.

Many central and local government offices create joint working groups and convene consultation meetings with both international organizations and local CSOs. However, civil society at times expressed frustration that these consultations are not always in the spirit of real cooperation. For example, the Parliament invited CSOs to participate in the constitutional reform processes in 2017, but CSOs eventually left the consultations as in their view the parliament did not acknowledge CSOs' concerns and contributions. In contrast, the new Public Defender, approved by the parliament in 2017, was one of four candidates proposed by CSOs.

On the local level, the main obstacle to policy dialogue is the low level of autonomy of local authorities and the limited capacities of local authority staff, including limited follow up by new authorities after local elections. While dialogue mechanisms do exist, their success is limited due to late information about the opportunities for dialogue, low capacities of potential stakeholders in the process, lack of awareness of rights to participate in decision-making and the limited authority of local government. Where policy dialogue does take place, it is characterised by Tbilisi-based organisations engaging local authorities, but this leads to questions about their legitimacy in representing local communities. Some Tbilisi-based organisations have regional offices and there is a slowly growing number of competent CSOs in the regions. Positive examples of dialogue in the regions exist and these can be used to build upon.

Due to their limited capacity, engagement of CSOs in good governance and public administration reform remains de facto limited to major CSOs.

CSOs actively participated in the monitoring both of the local government elections in October 2017 and the 2018 presidential elections. According to the Central Election Commission, seventy-one CSOs were registered as election observers in 2017 and 62 in 2018, although some of these were registered by political groups.

EU engagement with civil society

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) Riga Summit[24] in May 2015 identified four priority areas for engagement of the EU with its neighbors, namely economic development and market opportunities; connectivity and energy efficiency; strengthening institutions and good governance

[24] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/21-22/#; https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21526/riga-declaration-220515-final.pdf;

as well as mobility and people-to-people links[25]. They have been translated during the EaP Brussels Summit in November 2017 into 20 key deliverables[26] to be achieved by 2020, with increasing civil society engagement as deliverable number one to be reflected as a cross cutting issue in all areas. The EU Global Strategy in June 2016[27] confirmed the importance of deepening EU partnerships with civil society as well as sharpening the means to protect and empower civic actors, notably human rights defenders, sustaining a vibrant civil society worldwide.

The priorities and indicative allocations for financial assistance included in the Single Support Framework (2017-2020)[28] are connected to the overall policy objectives set out by the Association Agenda[29]. It also includes complementary support for civil society development (5% of the overall allocation of the Single Support Framework). Georgia also benefits from the EU's multi-country, regional ENI programmes[30] in this sector, in particular in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Global EU external assistance instruments, such as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)[31] and the Civil Society Organisation – Local Authorities (CSO-LA)[32] component of the Development Cooperation Instrument also allow for sizeable interventions in Georgia.

The EU is the main donor in this sector. Other key donors include most EU Member States, in particular Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, but also the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland and Norway.

Sweden has from 2018 introduced Sida Guiding Principles[33] for engagement with and support to civil society, focusing on strengthening CSO development, including their transparency and accountability.

Germany is currently supporting the Ministry of Finance, the parliament and the State Audit Office to engage into a dialogue with CSOs, which have a watchdog function therefore increasing the social accountability of the state bodies. The World Bank and the IMF are also active in this sector.

As a general trend, there is a continued need for strengthening the capacity within civil society. In several areas the thematic and technical capacity is satisfactory. On an overall level, capacity building would need to put more emphasis on strengthening CSOs in their own right. Democratic governance, accountability and legitimacy remain relevant areas to prioritize.

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[25] Referred further as "Riga priorities".
[26] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2017/11/24/ ; https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31690/eap-generic-factsheet-digital.pdf ;
[27] https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf .
[28] https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48497/georgia-single-support-framework-ssf-2017-%E2%80%93-2020_en ; https://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/PRO/2017/08/Anlagen/PRO201708105003.pdf?v=1.
[29] https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/35934/eu-and-georgia-adopt-revised-association-agenda_en
[30] The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/policy/european-neighbourhood-instrument-eni;
[31] European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights (EIDHR) - https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/eidhr_en.htm_en;
[32] Thematic programme NSA-LA- https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/thematic-programme-non-state-actors-and-local-authorities-development_en;
[33] Sida's new guiding principles for the cooperation with civil society. Sida should a) explore the various roles of civil society within their context, b) balance support towards a pluralistic civil society and civil society as implementing organizations, c) provide aid and development effective support to the civil society, d) support civil society partners' efforts to strengthen their own development effectiveness, including their transparency and accountability, d) engage in continuous dialogue with civil society. Final document will soon be available at https://www.sida.se/English/partners/our-partners/Civil-society-organisations

An EU regional programme to strengthen and promote CSO's role as critical actors of governance, e.g. increasing CSOs' capacity to engage and advancing financial sustainability of CSOs, is under development.

Increased strategic donor coordination on support to CS is also pursued by the EU Delegation and EU Member States.

The EU Delegation is in close and regular contact with civil society organisations, including regular consultations, in particular in preparation of policy dialogues, such as annual subcommittees or the Human Rights Dialogue. Such consultations feed also into programming deliberations. Dialogue with civil society is frequently facilitated for the visits of high-level EU officials or European Parliament members.

The EU Delegation has been successful in streamlining support to and engagement with civil society in all its areas of engagements. This is expressed in financial support of EUR 32 million to more than 80 civil society organizations through more than 20 open calls for proposals in the period of 2014-2017. While there are numerous sectoral initiatives for civil society, general support to further develop the capacities and sustainability of civil society is ongoing.

On a structural level, the **Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative** has been funded with EUR 4 million over four years to increase the role and impact of the civil society in the political, economic, social and cultural development of a modern Georgia. The action aims at achieving more transparent state funding mechanisms, stimulating philanthropy and corporate social responsibility; a more positive perception of civil society, applying international standards of transparency and accountability towards all stakeholders; improved civic participation and active CSO role in local and national policy-making. The main target group of the action is the active CSO community around 1,000 CSOs, almost half of which are in the regions (450) and other 2,500 civil society actors including business entities, media representatives and volunteers and youth activists as well as national and local authorities (LA).

Furthermore, the EU is supporting the concept of **social entrepreneurship (SE)**. During the last 10 years progress towards SE sector development has been observed, with increased interest towards the concepts among all sectors. With official statistics missing an estimated 70-75 social enterprises are actively operating in the country. Many were initiated with the support of EU programs and they target areas such as employment of vulnerable groups, environment protection, revitalization of rural areas, education, cultural heritage and access to social services.

With the overall objective to promote accountability, enhanced governance, inclusive and sustainable growth at local level, grants have been awarded to civil society and local authorities under the Civil Society and Local Authorities envelope 2016 (EUR 2.55 million) in various areas to strengthen the links between local actors and civil society and to increase civic participation.

With regard to **rural development**, the ENPARD[34] programme started in 2013. The technical assistance support provided to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) and to the direct budgetary support to the Government of Georgia has been supplemented with the involvement of civil society organizations over the different phases of ENPARD. Formal dialogue between CSOs, public authorities and the EU takes place primarily within the quarterly ENPARD

[34] ENPARD- http://enpard.ge/en/

Stakeholder Committee meetings. These meetings are co-chaired by the Ministry and the EU Delegation involving all implementing partners. Numerous grants were awarded to CSO consortia with an overall amount of nearly EUR 30 million to support the development of business-oriented agricultural cooperatives in different regions of Georgia, to implement rural development measures and to develop livelihoods in disadvantaged rural regions of Georgia. CSOs play a key role in agriculture given their ability to facilitate activities on the ground, promote bottom-up approaches and work effectively with final beneficiaries, such as farmers in remote rural regions.

Under the same ENPARD, the EU supported a project (2013-2016) aimed at building the capacity of local CSOs in the area of **food safety and consumer rights**, and to enhance citizen understanding, awareness and participation in these spheres. In addition to raising public awareness on food safety related consumer rights, the project also increased transparency and effectiveness of public institutions charged with implementation of reforms and developed food safety monitoring and advocacy capacities of 13 CSOs and youth groups. The dialogue between public institutions and CSOs on food safety takes place within civic hall public fora where CSOs represent consumer's interests and where public-private dialogues with Food Business Operators also take place.

While the EU's engagement in **social affairs** in Georgia is rather limited, efforts towards contributing to the professionalization of social workers have been undertaken. This has included a mapping of CSOs active in the social field in Georgia, which resulted in a database with 107 CSOs, managed by the Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW)[35]. A small grant programme benefitting five CSOs in Georgia was conducted as part of the EU funded project "Shaping Sustainable Social Change in Eastern Neighborhood Countries by Strengthening Social Workers and their Associations".

Except for the area of cultural heritage, CSOs engagement in **cultural policy** is quite limited. The EU supports Georgia's participation in the Creative Europe programme[36]. Cultural organizations benefit from teaming up with partners from all over Europe to get funding for cultural cooperation projects. Up to now, Georgia has 22 winners in the programme.

Civil society is involved in **social dialogue** related to EU assistance for DCFTA implementation. The Budget Support Programme on DCFTA/SME in 2014-2017 included regular consultation through two social dialogue groups involving civil society, namely the DCFTA Advisory Group and the Private Sector Development Advisory Council.

Public Finance Management (PFM) has long been a major focal sector for the EU in Georgia. Involvement of civil society was initially hindered as the relevant government institutions were reluctant to engage with CSOs on highly technical issues. Nevertheless, civil society participates in the PFM Reform Coordination Council meetings. The Council reviews and adopts PFM Sector Strategies and Action Plans and monitors their implementation. CSOs can participate but do not have the capacity to sustain a highly specialized dialogue. Their participation in this technical forum will be further supported and strengthened by an additional project financed under the Neighborhood Civil Society Facility, which also envisages the establishment of a civil society

[35] http://www.gasw.org/
[36] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/news/20150224-georgia-joins-creative-europe_en; https://bit.ly/2QwtSXd

budget monitoring coalition and which will provide capacity building and encourage public debate on current issues in PFM.

At **higher education** level, the EU supports the National Erasmus+ Office[37] (NEO, CSO itself by status). NEO is ensuring the regular engagement of CSOs in the successful application of the Erasmus+ programme in Georgia.

With regard to **vocational education training (VET) and labour market,** civil society was regularly consulted during the formulation of the new Skills for Jobs budget support programme.[38] The financing agreement on skills development and matching for labour market needs, worth nearly will start being implemented in 2019. The EU will help to deliver lifelong learning skills, entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship opportunities in four Georgian regions, including in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia. The programme envisages a EUR 7 million envelope aiming at enhancing the employability of target groups in the regions and improving outreach to female and male beneficiaries and vulnerable groups.

The EU had a very intense dialogue with different CSOs about the developments and challenges in the **justice sector**, also in identifying the main directions of EU-Georgia cooperation programmes and calls for proposals in line with the priority sectors defined in annual and multiannual action plans, as well as with regard to the implementation of individual projects with CSOs.

In 2018, the EU allocated funds (EUR 2 million) to CSOs for **monitoring judiciary, prosecutorial, penitentiary and juvenile justice reforms**. The EU continues funding CSOs, which provide **rehabilitation and resocialization services to ex-prisoners and probationers**,[39] or legal aid to vulnerable groups of people (EUR 4 million in total). There are six ongoing projects with CSOs on rehabilitation and resocialization of ex-prisoners and probationers and one project with on monitoring penitentiary reforms.

With regard to **human rights**, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) programme has been implemented in Georgia by the EU Delegation since 2003. 160 projects have been implemented so far for a total amount of 13 856 126 EUR. EUR 3.44 million have been awarded for EIDHR projects since 2014. The projects have been supporting, inter alia, the operation of elderly resource centres in different regions including the provision of free legal aid to elderly and most vulnerable persons, the promotion of health rights of children with hearing disabilities. School teachers from regions of Georgia have been supported through trainings to promote cooperation between public schools and CSOs to reduce early marriages, child labour and school drop-outs.

Under the 2014 **Human Rights for All** programme[40] nine grants have been awarded to CSOs to support the most vulnerable groups and to strengthen public oversight (EUR 4.5 million). Actions include regional outreach on preventing domestic violence, supporting and enabling vulnerable women and women offenders and their children, strengthening protection mechanism and advocacy work.

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[37] http://erasmusplus.org.ge/
[38] https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/37923/eu-transfers-gel-140-million-eur-481-million-georgia-support-reforms_en
[39] https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/17499/three-major-projects-launched-under-eugeorgia-justice-programme-eu4justice_en
[40] http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/projects/human-rights-for-all.html

Furthermore, **gender mainstreaming and women rights aspects** are integrated in the EU assistance programmes, in particular the news ones, e.g. Skills 4 Jobs and ENPARD. With the active support of EU Member States and other donors, in particular UN Women and UNDP, more concerns are voiced and publicly discussed. According to a recent study, 25%[41] of women in Georgia have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence. However, these figures may be much higher as the awareness and understanding of the domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of violence is still limited across the country. In this regard, the CSOs role is critical as they are those who can reach local communities and raise awareness. Therefore, it is important to stronger integrate gender related aspects in various sector programmes building on the success stories of EIDHR programme mentioned above and others. This would ensure continuous support not only to the people of Georgia but also to the CSOs and their capacity. An upcoming regional EU programme on gender, to start in 20-19, also represents a good opportunity for CSOs to engage.

Concerning the **breakaway regions**, the COBERM programme 2016[42] has been supporting confidence-building measures on different levels, including grass-roots initiatives and people-to people contacts. Selected sub-projects include actions on human rights trainings for different target audiences, monitoring human rights and human security, gender-based violence etc. Civil society support is complemented with a programme under ENI (EUR 1.4 million in 2016). A civil society resource centre was established in Sukhumi and following capacity building activities 27 grants were awarded for projects focusing on social and educational issues, as well as human rights.

I.2 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE EU ENGAGEMENT SO FAR

Societal resilience should be strengthened by deepening relations with civil society, notably in its efforts to hold governments accountable. Civil Society as a whole is very active in Georgia but would benefit from further support and better and more efficient use of financial resources in order to be able to continue playing its role in policy formulation and acting as a watchdog, in particular over the reform of the public administration and security sectors. Furthermore, the civil society organisations play an active role in preventing crime and potentially terrorist activities through their ground work on shaping the resilience of grass-root communities, in particular vulnerable groups. Civil society organisations play an important role in monitoring an effective and democratic civilian oversight over the security sector actors. The engagement of civil society organisations in the security policy domain strongly contributes to accountability and good governance: CSOs act not only as a government 'watchdog' but also as an index of public contentment with the performance of institutions and agencies responsible for public security and related services. Grants should be offered to civil society actors to monitor and evaluate the implementation of relevant policies, strategies and action plans of the security sector, or to conduct research, raise awareness, advocate for policy change or provide services to the population around security issues.

With regard to policy dialogue, the capacities of state institutions, including the Parliament and local authorities, to engage with civil society on an institutionalized and functional level need to

[41] UN Women: National study on violence against women 2017 http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/03/national-study-on-violence-against-women-in-georgia-2017#view

[42] http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/08/22/coberm-iii-call-for-project-ideas-.html

be strengthened. Authorities can be approached on this topic, but this often happens through informal instead of official channels. In addition, certain government ministries remain to be convinced of the usefulness of involving civil society in policy dialogue; this is particularly the case for highly technical ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, which sometimes argues that civil society lacks the knowledge to engage in a meaningful discussion on complex issues such as the budget process. In other cases, insufficiently advanced planning hampers the consultation process as CSOs are left with too little time to make qualified inputs to policy debates.

International indicators such as the Open Budget Index[43] show that there is room for improvement regarding opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process (22 out of 100 points). Future actions should therefore also increase the capacity of actors to fully embrace a culture of participatory decision-making.

Organisational development of CSOs also remains an area in need of improvement. Issues as formulation and effective implementation of projects as well as financial management need to be addressed. Furthermore, sustainability of organisations is often understood only as financial sustainability, without enough attention paid to program and institutional sustainability. Some CSOs rely solely on grants, while some perceive trading as a way of generating supplementary revenue to be used for the implementation of the CSO mission. Other CSOs may have a social entrepreneurial approach which potentially allows for an expansion of activities as a self-sustained Social Enterprise. Regardless of the business model in play, capacity building of the organisation will be an essential component to ensure sustainability.

To further strengthen CSOs institutionally and to increase (sustainable and long-term) social impact through scaling of Social Enterprises, it is appropriate to introduce modern support methodologies built on tailored, systemic and long-term approaches, as it is seen in Venture Philanthropy, Social Investment and support for private sector entrepreneurs and SMEs.[44]

Whilst international CSOs often have the required capacity to implement the larger EU projects, it is important to continue promoting cooperation between international and locally based CSOs, as well as to provide targeted capacity building opportunities for local CSOs. In order to promote local CSO development and regional network building, EU calls for proposals regularly include the requirement to submit proposals by co-applicants, including local actors. At the same time, the EU has also supported the development of networks, such as the Georgian National Platform or regional hubs.

In order to support and strengthen smaller and local CSOs, which cannot benefit from direct grants due to insufficient administrative capacities, calls for proposals regularly include the requirement to implement sub-granting schemes. To facilitate the broader distribution of knowledge, skills and know-how concentrated in Tbilisi-based experienced CSOs to regional and local CSOs different means of networking and partnership among CSOs should be encouraged. Partnership projects as well as projects with substantial sub-granting component should be encouraged and should include intensive coaching/training of weaker partners by the more experienced ones. Also, institutional strengthening of umbrella organizations like community development coalitions and social enterprise alliance could be considered as a priority.

[43] https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/georgia-open-budget-survey-2017-summary.pdf
[44] https://evpa.eu.com/knowledge-centre/publications/venture-philanthropy-and-social-impact-investment-a-practical-guide

Under the Civil Society complementary support facility[45] programme 2015 the EU Delegation designed a call for proposals offering operating grants to address the repeated request for funding mechanisms that could strengthen organisations both in terms of capacities and sustainability. The call was not met with the level of interest expected. A preliminary assessment hints at conditions that were not attractive enough, in particular, the limited funding of 30% of the annual programme of organisations and possibly the maximum period of implementation of one year. Hence, only three operating grants were awarded, which may not have had the desired effect on the organisation's sustainability.

During the consultation for the development of this roadmap, several usually highly technical areas (e.g. energy efficiency, WTO agreements, TBT, food safety/animal health issues, competition, IPR, public procurement, consumer rights, etc.) were highlighted where civil society may not be sufficiently capacitated to engage in policy dialogue or monitor government policies or where CSOs felt that they lacked access to relevant information.

The rapid expansion of the Georgian economy should not be made at the expense of the environment, therefore CSOs should be more involved in energy efficiency measures as well as those fighting against air, soil and water pollution, and supporting waste management, the sustainable management of biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources at central, local and regional level.

CSOs should be more engaged in youth policy monitoring and implementation as well as advocating policy measure for youth engagement. The focus should stay to reach the most vulnerable youth and Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETS), which would increase the scale of impact of the intervention. On regional level, the EU supports several initiatives under the EU4Youth programme which aims at equipping youth with entrepreneurship skills and help the most vulnerable youth to become change-makers. It is still challenging to have efficient policy dialogue on youth due to frequent changes of interlocutors on the government side, therefore engaging CSOs in this regard is crucial.

The Tripartite Commission[46] is functioning in Georgia with employers and employees being represented, and regular meetings are taking place. However, the voice of the CSOs is still weak. The Government and the Parliament are also making steps to involve CSOs into discussions (hearings in Parliament are organized and attended by some CSOs, meetings with the GoG to discuss new legislation), but further efforts needs to be taken to prepare better grounds for discussions (e.g. Regulatory Impact Assessment or similar assessments shall be presented to the CSOs when discussing the legislation) and more consistent follow up of such discussions (the CSOs often do not receive feedback on their specific comments).

One important lesson learnt for ENPARD, as expressed by the beneficiaries of the farmers' grant schemes, is that while agricultural support is vital for them, it is also important to address other social and economic needs to truly improve their livelihoods. On this basis, the adoption of the EU LEADER approach to rural development (ELARD) [47]as an integral part of the programme is allowing the beneficiary population, including local authorities, businesses and communities to establish local strategies and plans that reflect the particular needs of each targeted municipality,

[45] https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east-south/stay-informed/projects/neighbourhood-civil-society-facility
[46] http://gtuc.ge/tripartite-commission-social-partnership/
[47] http://www.elard.eu/

and to assist in the implementation of relevant projects to address these needs with sub-granting schemes.

Furthermore, although the ENPARD Stakeholder Committee is a platform that has been working quite well, sustainability may become an issue once the EU funding stops. Other avenues and platforms for cooperation and dialogue need to be established and/or strengthened. Also, the civic hall meetings taking place between public institutions and CSOs on food safety matters need to be strengthened. The meetings need to be organised more frequently and the format of such meetings needs to allow for constructive dialogue. These meetings should also ensure greater participation and geographical coverage outside of Tbilisi. For this, the number of civic halls should be increased and more meetings should be held outside the capital. Participants should be given sufficient advance notice to prepare for the meetings.

The 2016 establishment of the Private Sector Development Advisory Council and the DCFTA Advisory Group as part of the Advisory Council on Georgia's Trade Related Issues were positive steps from the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. Both contributed to institutionalise public-private dialogue, thanks also to the involvement of civil society and business community in the process.

Grant for CSOs should aim for creating legal and institutional platform for engagement in policy planning and monitoring at local and regional level. Together with the local interest groups, CSOs would also implement those territorial development measures that do not fall under the scope/mandate of national and regional/local authorities. There is agreement between the EU and the Government that the next phase of cooperation should include support for socio-economic development of focal regions (Kakheti, Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi) to improve living standards and conditions of the population through an inclusive, smart and sustainable socio-economic development, increased competitiveness and minimised imbalances. EU assistance should assist Georgian authorities in their works towards a more balanced territorial development aiming to create new centres of gravity apart from Tbilisi and Batumi. Expected results should include fulfilment of integrated territorial development issues in focal regions and building national and territorially based system for effective policy implementation – with the CSOs playing an important role in both.

It is recommended to improve the coordination and monitoring of the implementation process of the National VET strategy, including through the National VET Council (NVETC) [48], a quadripartite body established in 2012 and composed of representatives of the four target sector Ministries (MoES, MoLHSA, MoSYC, MoESD), employers, trade unions and civil society.

The phasing out of Global fund (the largest donor supporting the HIV/AIDS preventive and treatment measures) from 2020 amidst the absence of large scale donors in the health field creates the risk of a deterioration of the HIV/AIDS situation in the county. Availability of adequate funding for the HIV/AIDS preventive and treating measures are vital for keeping the low-prevalence status by country and the CSOs may play a role in this process, at least on the preventive side.

As also highlighted in a human rights USAID report on inclusive policy planning, CSOs should be supported in providing consistent and high quality work, facilitated through prioritisation, as a

[48] https://bit.ly/2E1k5S4

selective approach can produce higher and evidence based specialisation. Working in coalitions rather than following an individual approach would increase credibility.[49]

The EU has been supporting CSOs that deal with rehabilitation and resocialization services. Those are also partly funded by the state. Gradually, EU funding should phase out and these services should be fully supported by the government.

Lastly, civil society would benefit from a more positive perception of their work by the citizens of Georgia. It is recommended to reflect better the CSO sector into the national statistics so that the role of CSOs is visible.[50] Above-mentioned capacity building, cross sector partnership development and stimulation innovative approaches could lead to a better image of and trust into civil society.

I.3 RELEVANT REFERENCES AND SOURCES TO DEEPEN THE UNDERSTANDING ON THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

- Two ongoing external assessments are: (1) EU support to Rule of Law in Eastern Partnership Countries in 2010-2017, and (2) EU Justice Programme in Georgia in Oct. 2015 – July 2018. Once finalized, these two evaluations can provide useful insights into the state of civil society and EU engagement.
- ENPARD Final Evaluation (http://enpard.ge/en/final-report-evaluation-enpard-1/) – This is a final evaluation of the entire Programme and includes a section on the evaluation of work undertaken by all the CSO Consortia.
- Each year, the Europe Foundation publishes an independent assessment of government reform efforts in food safety[51]. This assessment usually includes a specific section assessing the engagement of civil society in the processes.
- Study financed by Europe Foundation – "**Situation Analysis of Civil Society in Georgia 2016"[52];**
- **Businesses in Georgia: Attitudes towards Corporate Social Responsibility and Civil Society Organizations –** Study conducted within the EU funded project "Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative";
- Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative – project baseline study[53];
- **Attitudes of the Population of Georgia towards, Civil Society Organizations, European Integration and Business Entities** - Study conducted within the EU funded project "Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative";
- **State Funding for Civil Society Organizations 2017 ,** Best practice research - Study conducted within the EU funded project "Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative"[54];

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[49] Towards inclusive Human Rights policies in Georgia: Efficient CSO Engagement in policy planning, implementation and monitoring' – USAID, 2017

[50] Attitudes of the Population of Georgia towards Civil Society Organisations, European Integration and Business Entities, 2018.

[51] http://www.epfound.ge/programs/current-programs-activities/european-integration/5832-2/;

[52] http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Situation-Analysis-of-CSOs-in-Georgia.pdf;

[53] For further details please contact "Georgian Civil Society Sustainability Initiative" team;

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- USAID Civil Society Index 2016[55],
- EIDHR Evaluation Report[56]
- 'Towards inclusive Human Rights policies in Georgia: Efficient CSO Engagement in policy planning, implementation and monitoring' – Report by USAID (Rusudan Mikhelidze), 2017: http://www.humanrights.ge/admin/editor/uploads/pdf/EWMI%20PROLoG%20Final%20Report%20Rusudan%20Mikhelidze.pdf
- The Caucasus Research Resource Centres (2017). „Trust towards CSOs" http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/TRUNGOS/
- Evaluation of four Georgian CSOs, procured by the Embassy of Sweden:

  https://www.sida.se/English/publications/160910/evaluation-of-four-ngo-implemented/
- The European Commission and the Government of Georgia High-level meeting of 21 November: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/54225/high-level-meeting-continues-bring-georgia-and-european-union-closer-together_en

https://csogeorgia.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5cd/c9b/a17/5cdc9ba17269a177050574.pdf
https://csogeorgia.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5cd/c9b/a25/5cdc9ba25e8b1977281243.pdf
https://csogeorgia.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5cd/c9b/a2e/5cdc9ba2e9f27712765466.pdf

[55] https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CSOSI_Report_7-28-17.pdf;
[56] https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/eidhr-evaluation-final-report-exec-sum_en.pdf;

I.4 UPDATE: ASSESSMENT 2018–2020

General overview

The period from 2018 to 2020 was a difficult time for Georgian civil society organisations (CSOs) from many points of view. 2019 was particularly complex, with anti-government protests in the capital leading to the detention, charging of peaceful protesters and attacks against independent media professionals.[57] The disputes between government and civil society were considered a 'democratic backsliding' by the international community.[58]

During the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020, CSOs demonstrated the capacity to adapt quickly to the new context and respond to the population's specific needs by assuming new roles and responsibilities, including strengthening community preparedness and resilience to emergencies, providing first aid and connecting citizens to public services.[59] CSOs and media also strengthened their watchdog role since they were actively holding the government accountable for the emergency response to the pandemic.[60] Although the pandemic posed a great challenge to the functioning of traditional civil society in Georgia, it also brought new opportunities for the sector in terms of digitalisation, constituency building, new forms of organisation and funding opportunities.[61]

The government made efforts to control the spread of the pandemic across the country by adopting and enforcing restrictive measures. Nevertheless, initial overwhelming public support for these measures waned quickly as the restrictions began to have an impact on human rights and basic democratic principles (due to perception of disproportionality of measures, on unequal application, and others).[62]

The Roadmap's indicators do not show any significant change in terms of civil society development in Georgia. But when looking into more concrete aspects, some progress in CSOs' capacity and participation was observed. At the time of the present assessment, it was too early to assess the impact of Covid-19 on reshaping the civil society landscape, since the indicators available and studies used for the present analysis only partially capture the impact of the pandemic on CSOs.

Enabling environment

The CIVICUS Monitor continued to rate the civic space in Georgia as "narrowed" – the second best category after "open".[63] The civic space in Georgia has remained among the most favourable

[57] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/georgia#; https://monitor.civicus.org/country/georgia/
[58] USAID (2020) 'Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index by USAID 2019', USAID, 2020
[59] Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, page 47. Further examples under https://eu4georgia.ge/?s=COVID
[60] Idem 3
[61] Idem 3
[62] Idem 3
[63] https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor

for civil society participation in the Eastern Partnership region in the last two years, jointly with Moldova.[64]

2019-2020 were politically challenging in Georgia. The June 2019 anti-government protests resumed in November of the same year, as Parliament failed to adopt a law that would allow the country to transition to a proportional electoral system. The government attempted also to limit the right to information.[65] The political situation further deteriorated during the parliamentary elections in October 2020. Many political parties and activists, including CSOs, claimed that the elections did not fully meet the OSCE/ODIHR international standards and domestic legal requirements. The electoral fraud reported by CSOs and electoral observers led to protests in the streets and clashes between protestors and law enforcement. Since then, and despite active EU mediation efforts, government and opposition have repeatedly reached 'political deadlock', over various opposing views.[66] This situation led to a polarised and tense political environment that has not contributed to improving government-civil society relations.

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the declaration of a state of emergency in March 2020 gave to the government the authority to restrict civil rights without the need to go through parliamentary approval. This included limitations on the right to public participation, public assemblies and gatherings, access to and spread of information, the right to privacy, and freedom of movement or over property rights.[67] CSOs and media claimed that these restrictions were applied in a discriminatory way. While the right of freedom to assembly was limited for some religious groups, the Georgian Orthodox Church was still allowed to conduct holiday ceremonies. The restrictions on movement seriously affected vulnerable groups, mainly minority groups, people with disabilities, ill and elderly people or those living in rural and remote areas as they could access public services only partially. CSOs were only able to support such vulnerable groups in a limited way. Fines for violations of restrictions were considered disproportionate. Furthermore, amendments to the Health Public Law, Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code raised concerns about their constitutionality and legality. Within this context of emergency, CSO activities have deteriorated in most cases. Although most CSOs were able to adapt somehow to the new context, very few were able to operate on regular basis and respond sufficiently to the needs of their beneficiaries due to the imposed restrictions.[68]

The combination of the 2019-2020 political instability and the pandemic restrictions since early 2020, would explain the setback for democratic progress in terms of the enabling environment, from 3.75 (closer to 1 = most democratic) to 4.25 in 2019 and 2020 (closer to 7 = least democratic), according to the Nations in Transit scores.[69] Nonetheless, the legal framework related to CSOs is considered to provide a fairly open legal environment in Georgia.[70] Organisations can act freely without significant legal and administrative barriers. An exception was organisations representing the LGBTQI+ community, which faced serious attacks from violent far-right groups, with very limited police effectiveness to protect them in 2021.[71] These groups and CSOs

[64] Idem 8.
[65] https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/05/06/residents-protest-mining-activities-csos-denounce-xenophobia-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/
[66] https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021C26/
[67] ECNL (2020) 'CSO Meter. Assessing the civil society environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia Country update',
[68] ECNL (2020) 'CSO Meter. Assessing the civil society environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia Country update', Tbilisi, 2020 see page 5; Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020
[69] https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/nations-transit/2021
[70] Idem 8
[71] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/georgia-the-authorities-failure-to-protect-tbilisi-pride-once-again-encourages-violence/

representing them continue to face an unfavourable social and political environment in which they encounter challenges to express themselves freely and act in a safe manner.[72]

In 2018, the Parliament initiated the process of regulating social entrepreneurship, including the draft of a Law on Entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is a growing source of funding for Georgian CSOs and represents about 18% of the organisations' income.[73] However, due to the current lack of a proper legal framework, very few CSOs are engaged in this type of business and operate successfully. The aim is to establish a legal framework that provides incentives for social entrepreneurship, as well as to institutionalise state practices towards supporting social entrepreneurship.[74] This legal package also includes amendments to the Law on Grants, the Law on Public Procurement, the Tax Code, the Law on Public Registry and the Law on Entrepreneurs. It is expected that these legislative reforms not only provide a legal framework on the social entrepreneurship but also a number of fiscal and financial support measures.[75]

The adoption of the new Decentralisation Strategy 2020–2025 should also contribute to increasing the diversification of funding sources to CSOs. Until now, local authorities could receive national and international grants only to perform their functions, but they were not allowed to issue grants. Nevertheless, municipalities have been able to provide funding to local CSOs, integrating their request for funding into municipal budget allocations, a practice commonly known as programmatic support.[76] With the explicit implementation of the Decentralisation Strategy, funding opportunities for CSOs at the local/regional level should increase since the strategy explicitly indicates that local governments should have the authority to provide grants to CSOs.[77]

Other important reforms that should enable CSOs to enhance their financial sustainability are the improvement of transparency of the public grant funding system that was reflected in the Open Governance Partnership Action Plan 2018-2019.[78] In 2018, the Parliament, in close collaboration with civil society, also developed the State Concept on State Support for CSOs with the aim of improving the enabling environment for CSOs. Concretely, it should 'foster civil initiatives, set up a development-focused environment for CSOs and ensure their real participation in the decision-making process', including CSOs' participation in decision making and financing.[79] The concept was elaborated with a wide participation and representation of CSOs. However, it has not yet been adopted.

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[72] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/georgia

[73] CSSIGE (2021) 'CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021 see page 21

[74] Idem. 19 page 15

[75] E.g., advantages in terms of taxes, re-investment of capital or state grants to support social entrepreneurship.

[76] CSI (2017). State Funding for Civil Society Organisations. Best Practice Research. Georgia Civil Society Sustainability Initiative financed by the European Union; Puig Piñol, G (2018) 'The public Financing model for Civil Society Organisations in Georgia', EPF

[77] Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025, Objective 2,1. p. 11 https://mrdi.gov.ge/pdf/5e468e292b317.pdf/Decentralization-strategy-ENG.pdf

[78] Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019 https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019, see p. 21-22

[79] ECNL (2020) 'CSO Meter. Assessing the civil society environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia Country update', Tbilisi, 2020 see page 13 and 14

Capacity of Civil Society Organisations

Organisational Capacity

According to most global indicators measuring the organisational and financial sustainability of CSOs in Georgia, capacity levels within CSOs remain largely unchanged.[80] These results also align with the findings of other studies about CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study 2021, the CSO Meter Report 2020 and the Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index by USAID 2020.[81] In these reports, no essential changes were identified in terms of organisational capacity. While CSOs based in the capital and a few urban centres seem to be better staffed, the capacity of CSOs acting in small settlements and rural areas remains underdeveloped and organisations are understaffed. Among others, this capacity, or rather its absence, is reflected in their ability to systematically produce activity and financial reports. As per the CSOs' mapping study, only half of the regional CSOs carried out annual financial statements or reports and only 26% acknowledged having published them.[82] Despite the support provided by many donors for CSO capacity development, including the EU, sustainability funding to support medium to long-term capacity development processes remains a challenge within the sector.

Following the analysis of the results of the CSO mapping, changes in terms of constituency building were also very limited.[83] No changes were observed in terms of the internal structure and functioning of these CSOs, which were still characterised as being 'run by one person' or having an institutional viability linked to their founders.

At the local level, Georgia has experienced an important increase of community-based organisations (CBOs) in the last ten years. CBOs cover a number of topics such as education, community leadership, women's empowerment and environment and provide basic services to their communities. They are mostly small size organisations with a low level of institutionalisation: 48% have less than 5 members; almost 50% of them have an income between 5 000 to 20 000 GEL and 35% less than 5 000 GEL. About 44% of CBOs would be receiving contributions from municipalities, 40% international funds and about 20% donations from a community or charity. Besides the financial constraints, these organisations are facing challenges related to access to equipment, adequate infrastructure and connectivity. At the same time, CBOs originate within the community and they have high potential to become an intermediary between the citizens and the government at the local level. Most of them meet the beneficiaries to seek feedback to improve their services and to gain their trust. In fact, 78.9% of CBOs confirm that they consult with local government during the implementation of their projects and more than 50% report initiating joint projects with the local administration. Some of them also engage in budget discussions (40%) and decision-making processes (38%).

The existence of a vibrant civil society was also demonstrated through the active role that the CSOs played during both the political crises since 2019 and during the pandemic. Since 2019, they have supported the constitutional reform; observed the elections and contributed to the civic

[80] Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index by USAID 2020, BTI 2020 country report, Nations in Transit report.

[81] CSSIGE (2021) 'CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021; ECNL (2020) 'CSO Meter. Assessing the civil society environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia Country update', Tbilisi, 2020; USAID (2020) 'Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index by USAID 2019', USAID, 2020

[82] CSSIGE (2021) 'CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021

[83] Idem.

response after the elections. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant number of CSOs have shown resilience and adaptability to new contexts and challenging situations. While many have struggled to maintain regular operations, certain organisations demonstrated a great capacity for responsiveness to health, social, and economic emergencies with the provision of services and support to address basic needs, filling 'the gap between the government's pandemic response and citizens' needs. The crisis also brought CSOs closer to their constituencies and citizens in general, creating spaces for enhancing CSOs' legitimacy and new identities.[84] A strengthened watchdog role of CSOs and media was also seen during this period, when the declaration of state of emergency gave the executive the power to limit civil rights. Within this context, civil society, comprising CSOs, civic movements, individual activists and media continuously raised the issue of an appropriately functioning system of checks and balances and the lack of transparency in the adoption of disproportionate measures to contain the pandemic. CSOs were able to mobilise citizens to react to these measures and provide fact checking to counterbalance official views, monitoring government public spending, social and health policies, as well as respect for human rights. To perform these functions, CSOs relied on the use of digital platforms (e.g. crowdfunding, Facebook).[85]

The environmental protests against hydropower plants in the Rioni Valley raised the support of most of the population across Georgia and provoked the organisation of protests in Tbilisi and Kutaisi. The protests against a lack of adequate government position and action to ensure peaceful conduct of the Dignity parade and prevent violent attacks on journalists in July 2021 showed that CSOs and civic movements were able to organise strong civic opposition against the breach of democratic standards and insufficient human rights protection. They proved to be persistent and determined to reach solutions in defence of community interests.

The pandemic also created opportunities for new forms of societal organisations. These mainly consist of groups of citizens emerging among the most vulnerable populations in their specific communities or areas. The emergent civic groups fundraised resources from community solidarity and crowdfunding actions[86]. Their main beneficiaries were those groups most affected by the social and economic consequences of the pandemic, such as the elderly, children with limited access to education, single mothers, victims of gender-based violence[87] and ethnic minority victims of hate speech[88].

Financial sustainability

The economic sustainability of CSOs remains a critical issue for the civil society sector. More than half of CSOs rely on grants provided by development partners. According to the mapping study carried out in 2018, funding from the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility increased from 7% in 2018 to 9% in 2019, in line with an observed enhanced awareness about Corporate Social Responsibility.[89] Nevertheless, capacity to fundraise further from private businesses is undermined by the absence of a consistent state policy incentivising business towards CSR and a rather weak relationship between CSOs and the private sector. In fact, CSOs

[84] Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020

[85] Idem 27 page 39

[86] Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020 page 3

[87] Idem 27

[88] https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/05/06/residents-protest-mining-activities-csos-denounce-xenophobia-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/

[89] CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021

are often perceived by the private sector as politicised and on the other hand, many CSOs do not accept funding from the private sector due to frequently reported violations of labour rights.[90]

Funding from state institutions has increased.[91] Interviewed organisations in the CSO mapping declared receiving a 50% increase in 2019 from 2018.[92] However, it seems that the distribution of these funds was not equitable across the geographic regions, as Tbilisi-based organisations were the main beneficiaries.[93] Some claimed that this funding tended to benefit government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) to further counter critical voices within the sector.[94] The implementation of the Open Governance Partnership (OGP) action plan and the Decentralisation Strategy 2020-2025, which foresee improved transparency in public funding and fiscal decentralisation, might further increase the role of state funding for CSOs.

Philanthropy and community fundraising were not sufficiently explored until the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, Covid-19 might have marked a turning point in terms of fundraising from the private sector and individual citizens. The growing readiness to provide first aid for addressing humanitarian issues incentivised CSOs to search for alternative ways to afford the provision of services through crowdfunding and citizen donations.[95] A slight increase in income from individual donations and profit for own businesses activities could also be observed in the 2020 survey. While in 2018, 12% of respondents acknowledged receiving donations from private individuals and 17% from income generation, in 2020, 16% of participants in the survey reported receiving donations from individuals and 20% from their economic activities.[96]

These developments showcase that CSOs are increasingly diversifying funding sources, but this progress is not yet indicative of any major decrease of aid dependency.

Moreover, core support opportunities are still limited and have in fact decreased during the last decade. This affects CSOs in terms of the right to initiative, longer-term term strategic planning of activities, flexibility and independent needs assessments.

Participation of Civil Society Organisations in policy dialogue

The CSO Mapping Study reported several actions and initiatives led by CSOs to promote changes in policymaking, which had achieved their objectives in the previous three years. The engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue has increased in recent years. Out of the surveyed organisations, 47% confirmed experiencing cooperation with various government agencies regarding different policy initiatives during 2018–2020. Furthermore, in 2018–2020, surveyed CSOs discussed 554 initiatives (295 in the regions) and in their opinion, two-thirds of the initiatives had been considered by the public agencies (234 in the regions out of 355), compared to 348 initiatives (169 in the regions) with 23% of the perceived consideration in 2015–2017.[97] The adoption of the OGP action plan and the EaP process created many of these opportunities for cooperation and dialogue,

[90] Natsvlishvili, V. 'Non-State Funding of Civil society organisations in Georgia 2019', CSRDG
[91] CSSIGE, Baseline Study, Tbilisi 2018. CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021; Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, page 47
[92] CSSIGE, Baseline Study, Tbilisi 2018. CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021
[93] Idem 36 page 21 and 22
[94] USAID (2020) "Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index by USAID 2019", USAID, 2020

[95] E.g., The civic initiative Help Elders, a Facebook platform, gathered about $30,000 to provide food, medicine, and other necessities and supported up to 1,000 seniors who were left without care.
[96] Idem 45 page 27 and 28
[97] CSSIGE, Baseline Study, Tbilisi 2018. CSOs in Georgia: Mapping Study, Tbilisi 2021

such as structural dialogue between the state and CSOs, including the framework of the Georgian National Platform for the EAP Civil Society Forum.

The CSO Meter 2020 also highlights the increase of spaces for CSO and citizen participation in decision making at the local level, as many municipalities introduced participatory budgeting, which is a citizen engagement mechanism that the Local Self-Government Code allows to introduce, in addition to the pre-listed citizen engagement instruments.[98] This has been acknowledged as a new entry point for CSO participation in decision making at the local level.[99]

It was equally observed that participation and advocacy in some of the EU priority sectors, for instance, in energy efficiency, environment and road safety, has improved. These positive trends are further confirmed by other indices, such as the Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index for 2019 and 2020, where the advocacy score improved slightly, going from 3.7 to 3.6 while retaining an 'evolving' status.[100]

During the pandemic, CSOs joined forces with the government to counter the effects of the pandemic.[101] CSOs have also played an important watchdog role in tracking public expenditure and making recommendations to prevent corruption, holding the executive accountable for its political and policy decisions in confronting the pandemic situation.[102] This role has been crucial in a situation where Parliament was not able to fully fulfil this role.[103] Unfortunately, participation of CSOs representing the most vulnerable groups, mainly ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities and women, continued to be rather limited. CSOs raised their voices on unreported cases of domestic violence, including in Abkhazia, where there is no law prohibiting gender-based violence. They have also voiced the rights of ethnic minority groups that became victims of hate speech for testing positive for Covid-19.[104]

Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19 for activism, CSOs found new and innovative forms of protest through digital platforms to, for example, overcome the restrictions imposed on the right of assembly and to continue pushing for legislative, electoral and public sector reforms.[105] But this situation is considered rather fragile. CSOs complained about attempts by the government to discredit them after the June 2019 political crisis and the 2020 post-electoral protests.[106] Many local and international CSOs reported government attacks against CSOs that criticised the government for corruption and governance malpractices. They claimed that the government used private media under their control to question the independence of CSOs and to express political allegations of critical CSOs. Social media has been reported as being used to discredit political opponents, in addition to civil society and independent media. This resulted in a polarised media environment, where journalists were often threatened, injured in protests and faced attempts of

[98] 40% of CBOs indicated to participate in budget discussions in Margvelashvili, A. 'CBO Mapping Report (2019-2020)', CBO Mapping-Interim Report page 36

[99] ECNL (2020) 'CSO Meter. Assessing the civil society environment in the Eastern Partnership countries. Georgia Country update', Tbilisi, 2020, page 11

[100] USAID (2020) 'Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index by USAID 2019', USAID, 2020

[101] https://eu4georgia.ge/?s=COVID

[102] E.g., Transparency International, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information

[103] Youngs, R. (2020) 'Global Civil Society in the Shadow of Coronavirus', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020

[104] Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2021) 'Country Update: Georgia' February 13, 2021, page 2

[105] Online and physically distanced protests were organised against the Georgian Dream's backtracking on electoral system reform.

[106] https://monitor.civicus.org/country/georgia/

unlawful interference. Within this context, the need to protect independent media becomes key to ensure the free space for civil society engagement.[107]

For a complete and balanced picture, however, it must be stated that there is little evidence to suggest that the capacity of CSOs to influence government decisions has improved in recent years. Most CSOs still face major challenges in influencing some key policies of the government, especially on issues such as human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Many CSO recommendations remain without and/or limited reaction or follow up from the government and parliament side.

EU engagement with civil society

In line with the priorities of the EU Roadmap 2018–2020, the EU launched a comprehensive Call for Proposals in 2020 to support CSOs in the following areas: enabling environment, sustainability of the civil society in Georgia, good governance, climate change and health aspects of environment protection, social entrepreneurship and human rights.

In guidelines for the call, support for vulnerable groups, mainly women, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, was mainstreamed into all civil society actions. These groups were also the main beneficiaries of four additional emergency actions supporting CSOs in the provision of services to victims of domestic violence, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons and the LGBTQI+ community.

Apart from the country-level support, the EU implemented 15 regional projects that provided support to local CSOs, mainly small and medium-sized organisations, community-based initiatives and independent small media. Some of these projects aimed to monitor the enabling environment for civil society in Georgia (CSO Meter), performance and impact of the EU support to small CSOs at the project level, as well as policy dialogue within the framework of the Association Agreement (EaP CS Forum Secretariat). All of these projects were adapted to address unexpected needs caused by the pandemic.

Conclusions

The political, economic and social environment in Georgia remains challenging. The polarised political landscape related to the June 2019 events and the 2020 Parliamentary elections, the Covid-19 pandemic but also the overall political situation in the EaP region (the conflict in and around Nagorno Karabakh, events in Belarus) require CSOs to apply new and innovative approaches to address the needs of their constituencies.

Limited access to information, insufficient public consultations, limited accountability of the government and introduction of anti-Covid-19 measures limiting civic space motivated CSOs to enhance their watchdog, advocacy and community mobilisation skills. Since the outset of the pandemic, CSOs have played a critical role in delivering basic services, in performing watchdog functions, monitoring and reporting activities on the implementation of these emergency measures and advocating on behalf of vulnerable groups as well as of disproportionally affected sectors.

[107] https://transparency.ge/en/post/georgian-media-environment-2016-2020; https://transparency.ge/en/blog/deterioration-media-environment-has-become-irreversible

CSOs, independent journalists and professional media have been key for gathering fact-based and accurate information about the pandemic and its health risks, government measures and restrictions and countering growing disinformation. These proactive steps taken by CSOs have helped shape stronger links with their constituencies. On the other hand, the Covid-19 crisis severely affected many CSOs and civil society activists limiting their capacity to operate. Financial and organisational survival is a risk some CSOs and independent media have had to face as donations dropped and future funding may be reduced.

The pandemic also prompted CSOs to search for new and alternative working methods using digital tools and online platforms. Among other things, CSOs used online tools to mobilise community fundraising, crowdfunding actions and mobilising citizens for civic/community actions. Civic emergency response became significantly visible among community-based initiatives, small local CSOs, volunteers and informal groups of citizens that came together to support members of their communities. It is expected that these new ways of civic mobilisation and engagement are likely to remain after the pandemic as they bring new opportunities for CSOs' development, citizen engagement and attract segments of the population that are traditionally less active on the civic stage, especially in the regions (e.g., youth, women, ethnic minorities). Digitalisation of civil society and ensuring a free digital space become a priority to ensure CSOs' effectiveness, sustainability and independence.

The need to enhance the potential of think tanks, including through regional and European networks has also been noted, especially in consideration of the regional political situation and association with the EU.

Although some tendencies were observed, as outlined above, it is still too early to assess what was the long-term impact of these developments on civic participation and sustainability of CSOs. Based on the available assessment reports, the present analysis indicates that the overall situation of the civil society sector of Georgia remains largely unchanged and the main priorities of the Road Map elaborated in 2018 remain valid for the next period. However, a number of recommendations can be put forward.

I.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021-2024

Within this context, it is necessary to continue providing support for:

- Capacity development of civil society organisations to increase their capacity to form coalition initiatives, advocate for reforms, engage professionally on specific themes (such as notably justice and judiciary reforms but also climate change, sustainable urban development, energy efficiency, waste management, road safety, circular economy, security sector oversight and oversight in general, and others) hold government and local authorities accountable as well as to respond to sudden changes in a fragile and volatile political, social and economic context;
- Financial sustainability, including diversification of funding resources and strategy to reduce the aid dependency;
- Capacity development to strengthen the internal governance of CSOs, to increase and consolidate their constituency, representation and mobilisation functions, adhere to ethical standards, improve and uphold the standards of financial transparency self-regulation, and enhance other relevant initiatives which will lead to greater independence of civil society;
- Digitalisation of CSOs sector in a context of enhanced civic engagement through digital means (e.g. distance learning or online learning tools), to increase financial sustainability (e.g. crowdfunding), , effectiveness and innovation in providing better services;
- Adoption of principles and standards for the provision of state funding to all CSOs in a transparent, open, competitive and non-discriminatory manner. A holistic approach towards digitalisation of the CSOs sector and public administration sector would not only allow a systematic adoption and application of these principles and standards but also reduce administrative burden on both CSOs and state institutions while increasing fair competition and transparency in the awarding process of state funding.[108]
- Mainstreaming CSOs participation in priority areas in sector policy development and monitoring, as per the Multi Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 in the following areas: (1) Resilient, sustainable and integrated economy, including DCFTA implementation; (2) Accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; (3) Environmental and climate resilience; (4) Resilient digital transformation; (5) Resilient, fair and inclusive societies;
- Continuous monitoring of civic space that triggers early warning of potential shrinking space and contributes to an enabling environment for civil society to operate;
- Systematic engagement with the EU and EaP think tank community in public debates that enrich the EaP framework with a pool of expertise and support to local think tank capacity building;
- Actions that seek to enhance the enabling environment for CSOs by advocating for legal and policy reforms, including advocacy for the adoption of the State Concept on CSOs, the law on social entrepreneurship and the amendment of the Local Self-Government Code to transfer the necessary fiscal, administrative and political competences to the municipalities for issuing grants;

[108] E.g., creation of a unique digital platform where all the state funding opportunities are published, CSOs can use for applying and government for managing CSOs grants complying with transparent, financial management sounding and fair competitions principles. In case that each sector needs specificities in their grant system due to the complexity of the issues, then a system that centralises all state grant schemes digitally to improve the management, coordination, complementarity, transparency and fair competition of all these mechanisms could also be created.

- Strengthening of EU and EU MS supported mechanisms and concepts particularly related to SDGs.

Special attention should be given to CSOs working on human rights and democratic standards, including electoral reform, rule of law, anti-corruption, ethnic minorities and a free and independent media environment. Optimally, support towards such organisations should target both formal and informal emerging groups.

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PART II – EU STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN TO ENGAGE WITH CSOs (2021 UPDATE)

Key challenges and opportunities	Priorities for EU engagement with CS	Targets of EU engagement with CS	Actions/Activities (analysis, policy dialogue, financial or non-financial support)	Indicative means (programmes/instruments)
Priority 1: To strengthen CSOs' role in decision-making processes at local and national level through different means (policy dialogue, implementation, watchdog, advocacy and awareness raising campaigns) in particular in the priority areas defined in the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021 – 2027 for EU – Georgia cooperation[109]				
Opportunities: CSOs demonstrated the capacity to adapt quickly to the new context and respond to the population's specific needs by assuming new roles and responsibilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. An important increase of community-based organisations (CBOs) in the last ten years – CBOs have high potential to become an intermediary between the citizens and the government at the local level. Proven capacity of CSOs and civic movements to organise strong civic opposition against the breach of democratic standards and insufficient human rights protection, as well as breach of environmental principles. CSO funding from state institutions has increased. Increased diversification of funding sources: turning point due to the ongoing	To support CSO engagement in the policy dialogue with government, implementation, watchdog/monitoring of policies in the MIP priority areas[110]: 1) A resilient, sustainable and integrated economy 2) Accountable institutions, the rule of law and security 3) Environmental and climate resilience 4) A resilient digital transformation 5) A resilient, fair and inclusive society To support advocacy and awareness raising measures	Increased CSO capacity to participate in policy sector dialogue, implement and monitor policy implementation in all MIP priority areas. By 2024 CSOs are mainstreamed in all EU priority areas, particularly where the presence and participation of civil society organisations was rather limited (e.g., energy, climate, EIA) Improved awareness of the EU priority areas, as defined in the MIP.	**Financial Support**: Call for Proposals including geographical diversification, urban vs rural, partnerships and inclusion criteria. **Non-Financial support (e.g. facilitation):** CSOs invited to conferences and steering group meetings organised in the framework of EU-funded actions; regular policy dialogue with involvement of CSOs among others in the framework of EU Green Week, EU Sustainable Energy Week, EU Mobility Week; EU Youth/Cultural Week. Improving the capacity CSOs to reflect gender and marginalised groups' participation in the EU priority areas.	EU and EU MS programmes and instruments Other States active on civil society in Georgia and their respective Cooperation Agencies Other actors: EED, EaP Civil Society Forum and its National Platform Some examples of relevant EU-funded projects and initiatives: EU-funded Covenant of Mayors EaP Road Safety

[109] Note that the priorities had yet to be formally approved at the time of adoption of the Roadmap. They are: Priority 1: A resilient, sustainable and integrated economy; Priority 2: Accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; Priority 3: Environmental and climate resilience; Priority 4: A resilient digital transformation and Priority 5: A resilient, fair and inclusive society.
[110] Ibid.

Key challenges and opportunities	Priorities for EU engagement with CS	Targets of EU engagement with CS	Actions/Activities (analysis, policy dialogue, financial or non-financial support)	Indicative means (programmes/instruments)
pandemic in terms of fundraising from the private sector and individual citizens. The engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue has increased in recent years. Many municipalities recently introduced participatory budgeting. CSOs found new and innovative forms of protest through digital platforms. **Challenges**: Further deterioration of the political situation during the parliamentary elections in October 2020. Further political polarisation in the country and in the civil society sector. Limitations on the right to public participation, public assemblies and gatherings, access to and spread of information, the right to privacy, and freedom of movement or over property rights (linked to the Covid-19 restrictions) Poverty and unemployment remain high in the country. Significant disparities between urban and rural areas, in terms of income and living standards due to unequal access to basic services. Limited CSO capacities to engage in specific sectors (e.g. thematic understanding)	promoted by CSOs in the EU priority areas.		**EU-Government Policy dialogue** to advocate for the participation of CSOs in sector policy dialogue, policy implementation etc.	Cooperation Framework EU4youth, Skills4Jobs, Erasmus+ Creative Europe EU4Culture programme Civil Society STAR Initiative EaP Civil Society Facility regional programme

Key challenges and opportunities	Priorities for EU engagement with CS	Targets of EU engagement with CS	Actions/Activities (analysis, policy dialogue, financial or non-financial support)	Indicative means (programmes/instruments)
The economic sustainability of CSOs remains a critical issue for the civil society sector. Despite the resilience shown by many CSOs during the Covid-19 crisis, many organisations struggled to maintain regular operations. The participation of CSOs representing vulnerable groups remains limited.				
Priority 2 – Promote collective action through supporting partnerships between CSOs, local authorities, businesses and media, in particular on specific themes such as DCFTA and other sustainable economic development issues supported by the EU and EU MS, as well as EIB and EBRD, under Team Europe approach				
Opportunities: The engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue has increased in recent years. Many municipalities recently introduced participatory budgeting. **Challenges**: Poverty and unemployment remain high in the country. Regions have different territorial, social and economic characteristics. Significant disparities between urban and rural areas, in terms of income and living standards persist. Limited capacity of Georgian administration at regional levels. Limited CSO capacities to engage in specific sectors (e.g. thematic understanding), including engagement in and understanding of regional/local/rural	To increase awareness within civil society about the challenges and benefits of a balanced and inclusive economic development and about CSOs' role in supporting it within the framework of the DCFTA. To strengthen civil society's role (in particular that of business associations, chambers of commerce, professional associations) in providing information and support to small and medium size enterprises. To increase dialogue between businesses and civil society in order to understand the benefits of collaboration in economic development and improved business climate and	Georgian civil society is more actively informed and supports DCFTA implementation through increased knowledge about DCFTA related issues by 2024 (in particular by promoting the advantages of the DCFTA for Georgia). More active CSO engagement in private-public policy dialogue, public debates and public-private partnerships, at least in the main economic development sectors targeted by the EU priority areas. Consumer rights, food and non-food product safety are enhanced.	**Financial support:** Calls for Proposals to support CSO initiatives that promote equal opportunities for women and men as well as minorities and marginalised groups to take an active part in regional development matters; foster minority and marginalised groups participation in planning and implementation of regional/local development strategies; strengthen CSOs along the DCFTA implementation process and along the implementation of the SME strategy for Georgia; Further enhance formal engagement of CSOs in rural development at all levels.	EU and EU MS programmes and instruments Other States active on Civil Society in Georgia and their respective Cooperation Agencies UN Agencies such as UNDP, UNWOMEN Other actors: EED, EaP Civil Society Forum and its National Platform.

Key challenges and opportunities	Priorities for EU engagement with CS	Targets of EU engagement with CS	Actions/Activities (analysis, policy dialogue, financial or non-financial support)	Indicative means (programmes/instruments)
development and food safety The economic sustainability of CSOs remains a critical issue for the civil society sector. Despite the resilience shown by many CSOs during the Covid-19 crisis, many organisations struggled to maintain regular operations. The participation of CSOs representing vulnerable groups remains limited.	increase in social entrepreneurship To increase CSO engagement in skills development for employment and matching for labour market needs (EVET and TVET) To support CSOs in their work on consumer protection and the economic empowerment of women.		**Non-Financial Support (e.g. facilitation):** Involvement of CSOs in Local Action Groups and in the Inter-Agency Coordination Council (IACC) for rural development; Involvement of CSOs in the functioning of Regional Consultative Councils for the selection of projects to be financed from the Regional Development Fund; supporting the involvement of CSOs in the EU – Georgia Civil Society Platform **EU-Government Policy dialogue** to ensure social dialogue on DCFTA implementation continues; The established DCFTA Advisory Group and Private Sector Development Advisory Council meet regularly, develop the respective action plans and implement them.	Some examples of relevant EU programmes and initiatives: Support to EU-Georgia DCFTA and Small and Medium size Enterprises (SMEs) EU4 Integrated Territorial Development EU4Business to support dialogue between sectoral business associations ENPARD III and ENPARD IV grants for rural development
Priority 3 – To enhance CSO development to drive effective sustainable economic and democratic development (CSO effectiveness)				
Opportunity: There is still space and need for further CSO engagement to ensure more effective civic participation in policy dialogue and public debates at central and local level and to strengthen	To enhance CSO accountability and transparency towards their members and improve public perception of civil society.	More capable, transparent, accountable, effective and financially independent and sustainable CSOs by 2024, in particular more empowered small and medium sized	**EU-Government Policy dialogue** to improve the environment for CSOs, including the institutional framework. **Financial support** (CfP, core funding) to projects and	Capacity building measures for CSOs funded under EU bilateral and regional programmes (CSSP/ ENI/ CSO-LA/ HR&D/CSO thematic

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accountability and transparency mechanisms. An important increase of community-based organisations (CBOs) in the last ten years – CBOs have high potential to become an intermediary between the citizens and the government at the local level. The use of digital platforms to reach out to beneficiaries as a way to mobilise citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to further digitalise the sector. **Challenges:** Insufficient level of institutionalisation of policy dialogue, public debates and consultation, especially at local level. Weaknesses in CSOs' institutional, administrative and organisational capacities. Limited technical and thematic expertise Donor dependency and insufficient diversity of funding mechanisms Weak participation of women and youth CSOs, CSOs representing various marginalised/disadvantaged groups (i.e., ethnic minorities, PwDs) Limited social entrepreneurship and innovation spirit within the CSO sector as a mean to ensure economic sustainability, lack of sufficient business skills among	To enable CSO to increase the share of their funding coming from diverse and innovative sources: governmental sources, crowdfunding, social enterprise, as providers of social services, direct individual support, working closer with businesses. To increase EU MS donor dialogue on more efficient support to strengthen civil society. To increase the diversity of CSOs involved in the implementation of EU and EU MS priorities in Georgia, including: • Ethnic minority rights CSOs • Organisations working with women and / or on women's rights • Organisations working with young people and / or	CSOs. CSO accountability towards citizens (downward accountability) is improved by 2024. CSOs have increased the number of sources of funding. The number of the following CSOs involved in EU initiatives increased: • Ethnic minorities CSOs • Organisations working with women and / or on women's rights • Organisations working with young people and / or youth issues. • Think tanks • CSOs representing vulnerable groups Digitalisation of CSOs' internal and external processes (e.g., management, M&E, reporting and/or engagement with constituencies) is initiated or	organisations aimed at supporting participative processes, projects and capacities to enhance: • CSO accountability and transparency • Sustainability through partnerships between local CSOs with international ones, local authorities, businesses (CSR), social and innovative entrepreneurship activities as a means for financial sustainability. Targeting specifically: ethnic minorities CSOs, women organisations, youth organisations, umbrella organisations / independent media, think tanks, CSOs representing vulnerable groups **Communication** to enhance the visibility of CSO actions;	programmes/ EED), as well as EU Member States initiatives; Civil Society STAR Initiative The EaP Civil Society Facility Generally, all programmes include civil society funding and/or various engagement opportunities (mainstreamed support)

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the social enterprises, under-developed business support ecosystem and non-existence of legal framework regulating social entrepreneurship in Georgia.	youth issues. • Think-tanks • CSOs representing vulnerable groups • CBOs To support the digitalisation of CSOs' internal and external (e.g. registration, state funding etc.) processes and procedures	further developed. More government processes and procedures related to CSOs are digitalised.		
Priority 4: Supporting an enabling environment for increased participation of CSOs in the public arena through ensuring rule of law and the protection of human rights in Georgia				
Opportunity: Emergence of new forms of civic activism in the form of informal groups that are created to carry out a specific action that often result in addressing fundamental rights (e.g. environment, access to basic services during Covid-19). Proven capacity of CSOs and civic movements to organise strong civic opposition against the breach of democratic standards and insufficient human rights protection, as well as breach of environmental	To strengthen the role of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of public administration and security sector reform, as well as in overseeing relevant institutions, and in general the rule of law. To enhance the capacities of local authorities to conduct inclusive and transparent policy-making on the local level within their field of competences, and to involve their constituencies in consultations and public debates to ensure that citizens are aware of and participate in local public affairs and receive adequate services. To strengthen CSOs'	Strengthened role of the civil society in the planning, implementation and monitoring of public administration and security reform sectors. Increased participation of CSOs in decision-making at local level. Human rights organisations, independent journalists and media are better positioned and better equipped to protect human rights, the rule of law and to promote fundamental freedoms. Increased participation of	**Financial support:** Thematic calls for proposals for advocacy actions, capacity building measures for civil society on specific areas of security sector oversight, local governance; for CSOs from minority groups and emerging groups. In Abkhazia, a Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) is being implemented. **Policy dialogue** linked to budget support, through national policy platforms on PAR, anticorruption, transparency, OGP (supported by PAR programme) to strengthen the	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Human Rights and Democracy under NDICI programmes EU funded Security Sector Programme (SAFE) Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) COBERM IV Regional Partnership Frameworks (PIN, HRH etc.)

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principles. CSOs found new and innovative forms of protest through digital platforms. **Challenges**: Limitations on the right to public participation, public assemblies and gatherings, access to and spread of information, the right to privacy, and freedom of movement or over property rights (linked to Covid-19 restrictions). Local authorities should be better empowered to perform inclusive and sustainable local development policies. Human rights and the rule of law still need to be further promoted and protected in Georgia at all levels (in particular women, youth, children and other vulnerable/marginalised groups) There is shrinking space for civil society activity in South	competences and capacity to improve cooperation amongst CSOs and between CSOs, government institutions and business, at national, regional and local levels in a human rights context. To promote an enabling environment for the promotion of fundamental freedoms through supporting human rights defenders most at risk, independent journalist/media and CSOs in activities related to human rights violations. To ensure the rights of minority / disadvantaged / vulnerable groups (e.g. women, PwD, ethnic minorities, LGTBIQ+) as well as emerging community groups/new forms of activism. To strengthen CSO capacity in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to address the most pressing needs of the local communities and to facilitate confidence-building measures and cross-ABL contacts.	minority/disadvantaged/ vulnerable groups in decision-making processes at local and national level. A more developed civil society in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia.	dialogue between the Security Sector institutions and CSOs	Civil Society STAR Initiative

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Ossetia and Abkhazia and limited funding				