

2021 CSO METER

Trends and recommendations



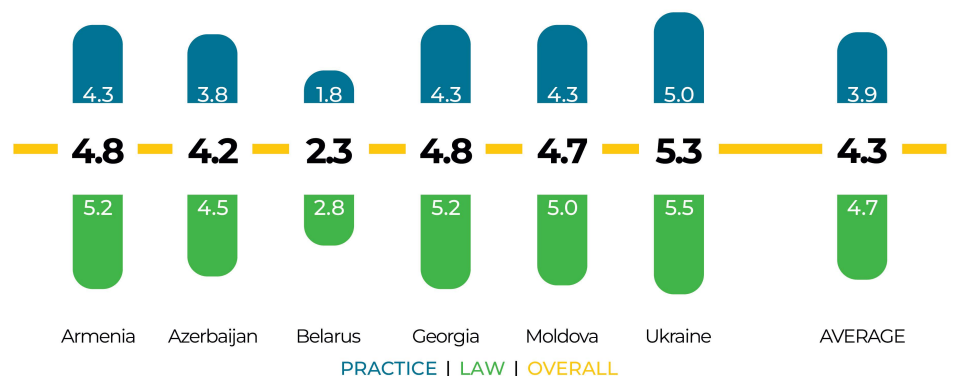
CSOs in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region faced numerous challenges in 2021: their space to operate and possibilities for activism faced restrictions, both in law and in practice. Civil society in Belarus took the hardest blow with severe prosecution, sanctions and forced liquidations for both unregistered and registered CSOs.

CSO Meter partners analysed **11 key areas of civil society operation in 6 countries:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, covering the period between September 2020 - December 2021.

Our research found that **access to funding and overall financial sustainability** have remained critical issues to the future and long-term work of CSOs in the region. This was particularly visible in Azerbaijan and Belarus, with the latter introducing additional restrictions on foreign funds and other sources of funding (e.g., cash and anonymous donations). State funding is underdeveloped and provided only to a limited scope of CSOs via non-transparent and unaccountable

procedures. Tax benefits and individual and corporate philanthropy remained unavailable or difficult to obtain. The COVID-19 pandemic further limited **CSOs' participation in decision-making** in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. At the same time, some CSOs in Azerbaijan and Moldova reported an increased interest in dialogue from relevant authorities.

2021 CSO Meter Scores: Civil society environment in the EaP



In the 2021 CSO Meter report we identified the **following regional trends:**

1. Crisis measures (to tackle COVID-19 and conflict) limited civic freedoms and affected the CSO environment.
2. Digitalisation progresses faster than the provision of related protections and the enjoyment of digital rights.
3. CSOs face increased attacks, stigmatization, and surveillance.
4. There are limitations and burdensome requirements on access to funding.
5. Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing measures continue to create burden for CSOs.

Ukraine had the most favourable CSO environment (5.3), while Belarus had the most unfavourable environment (2.3) in the region.

Out of 11 key areas of civil society environment scored in Law and Practice, Ukraine was leader in 7 areas, and those are: Equal treatment, Right to participation in decision-making, Freedom of expression, State duty to protect, State support, State/CSO cooperation and Digital rights. Georgia and Armenia were leaders in 2 areas each. Georgia was leader in Freedom of Association and Access to funding, while Armenia was leader in Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Right to Privacy.

In the 2021 CSO Meter report we identified the **following regional recommendations for the EU and other donors:**

- **Maintain and strengthen focus on supporting an enabling CSO environment in the countries of the region** through continuous use of evidence.
- **Incorporate key CSO Meter reports recommendations in policy dialogue** with EaP country governments.
- **Continue facilitating the dialogue between CSOs and state authorities** on the issues facing the CSO environment at the regional and country level.
- **Increase the amount and types of funding for CSOs**, particularly to watchdog and human rights organisations, and for engaging in advocacy for improving the CSO environment.
- **Advocate for the elimination of limitations** on foreign, anonymous or other sources of financing, and of limitations on specific fundraising methods.
- **Ensure a flexible approach regarding project implementation and management** in the times of government restrictions and crises, including regarding project timelines, tools, deliverables, and reporting, as well as the need for security and relocation of staff, among others.
- **Engage in regular and direct consultations with CSOs** to understand their needs and the rapid changes in their environment.
- In planning for **funding priorities and political support** consider the:
 - politically motivated allegations and criminal and administrative charges made against CSO activists and CSOs by certain authorities;
 - specifics of CSOs that have moved their organisations abroad, as well as those that continue to operate within the country.

For more information, please read the 2021 CSO Meter regional report available [here](#).

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2021 CSO METER

Key country developments and priorities

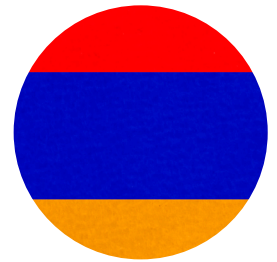


In 2021 CSO Meter partners analysed **11 key areas of civil society operation in 6 countries:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, covering the period between September 2020 - December 2021. We identified key priorities in each country where immediate advancements through EU support, progressive laws and practices are needed:

Armenia

Key developments:

- All public organisations should publish annual reports (requirement entered into force in 2021).
- CSOs negatively affected by increased hate speech and disinformation.
- The government improved the procedure for CSO state funding and started the process of online application.
- Legislative changes allowed CSOs specialised in disability rights to present public interest cases in the courts.



Key priorities:

- Develop jointly with CSOs, adopt, and implement a comprehensive roadmap for a more enabling environment for CSOs.
- Ensure CSO financial sustainability (increased, transparent, competitive and accountable state funding at the national and local levels; a more favourable tax environment).
- Provide more meaningful participation in policymaking by utilising the available institutional mechanisms of participation, engaging CSOs in the early stages of policy development, enforcing mandatory consultations on all legislative drafts and demonstrating a genuine interest and commitment in seeking input from civil society and the public.
- Address the widespread hate speech and disinformation in online platforms that often targets CSOs and associated persons.

Azerbaijan

Key developments:

- Increased government initiatives and meetings for dialogue with various CSOs.
- The NGO Support Agency replaced the former NGO Support Council. An independent Advisory Board was formed that included CSOs.

Key priorities:

- Simplify the registration procedure for CSOs (reduced timelines and abolish the subjective treatment by the MoJ).
- Simplify the reporting obligations of CSOs depending on their size and turnover.
- Abolish the requirement to obtain permission to hold events in the regions.
- Simplify the registration of grants and donations (eliminate subjectivity on decisions for registration and digitalise the process to be fast and accessible).
- Abolish the requirement to register service contracts.
- Eliminate the need to report on small donations (110 EUR per donor/year).



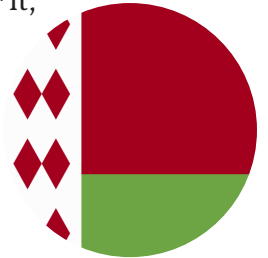
Belarus

Key developments:

- Authorities forcefully liquidated hundreds of CSOs, restored criminal liability for activities of unregistered organisations, broadly applied other articles of the Criminal Code for repression and intimidation of citizens, to coerce media, CSOs and dissenting citizens into silence.
- Many CSO leaders and key activists left Belarus to operate from other supportive jurisdictions Lithuania, Georgia, Poland and Ukraine.

Key priorities:

- Release all individuals recognised as political prisoners, with the review and lifting of all sentences imposed on them and pending decisions on their liability. Political prisoners should receive adequate compensation and all politically-motivated criminal cases should cease.
- Abolish the Law “About counteraction to extremism” and all by-laws adopted under it, including the Index of extremist formations.
- Cancel criminal responsibility for organising and participating in the activities of an unregistered organisation (Article 193I of the Criminal Code) and abolish the ban on activity of public associations without registration.
- Stop the practice of forced liquidation of CSOs and cancel all court and local authorities’ decisions on forced liquidation of public associations, foundations and private institutions made in 2020-2021.
- Cease all forms of pressure on CSOs, lawyers and human rights defenders, journalists, and independent media, including the state-inspired campaigns of discrediting these groups in the media.
- Close and destroy the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ unified database of participants in unauthorised demonstrations (also known as the BESporiadki database) and its equivalents.
- Avoid using facial recognition technology (FRT) and other techniques for identifying protesters, internet and cell phone users to persecute individuals for their opinions.
- Eliminate legislative possibilities and the practice of internet disruption and the blocking of websites without court decisions.
- Cease the misuse of legislation and investigative powers on combating terrorism and AML/CTF legislation to restrict civic freedoms, as well as access to funding for CSOs.



Georgia

Key developments:

- A scandal indicated alleged covert surveillance by the State Security Service of phone conversations of many individuals, including CSO representatives and journalists.
- Imposed limitations on rights and freedoms due to the Covid-19 pandemic, affect the timely and in-person participation of CSO representatives in decision-making.
- Authorities failed to protect participants attending the 5 July Pride event, including from physical harm.

Key priorities:

- Adopt a systemic vision for state-CSO cooperation on all levels of the decision-making process and further institutionalise these standards.
- Develop unified legislative standards for state funding, encompassing clear guidelines for the award process.
- Urgently introduce legal amendments to create comprehensive legal safeguards for personal data processing and covert investigative actions, including by reforming the State Security Service of Georgia and increasing its oversight.
- Design and adopt unified standards/rules on public consultations of draft laws and policies at the national level.
- The Prosecutor’s Office should prioritise and promptly investigate alleged illegal and arbitrary surveillance of CSO representatives, journalists, and others.



Moldova

Key developments:

- Several laws and regulations were adopted such as the Law on Local Action Groups and the Regulation on Subsidising Jobs (regarding the employment of disabled people in social entrepreneurship).
- Increased revenue of CSOs from the percentage designation mechanism by 53 per cent.
- A positive shift in the government and parliament attitude on cooperation with CSOs.



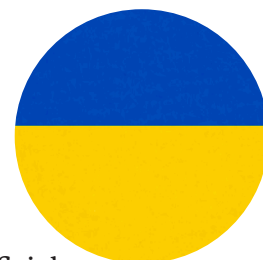
Key priorities:

- Develop and adopt new strategic documents for the development of civil society.
- Adjust the legislation for public procurement to include a mechanism for contracting social services.
- Develop a unified online platform for transparency and CSOs' participation in decision-making.
- Amend the Law on Philanthropy and Sponsorship to encourage philanthropic activities.
- Develop a unified mechanism for state funding of CSOs and transparency in the process of the assessment and monitoring of the vulnerability of CSOs to terrorist financing.

Ukraine

Key developments:

- The government provided online competitions for public funds for CSOs to the platform Vzaemo.Diia.
- The civil sector, together with the state institutions, developed an updated National Strategy for Civil Society Development for 2021-2026.



Key priorities:

- Implement the provisions of the National Strategy.
- Abolish the requirement for CSOs to provide information on their ultimate beneficial owners.
- Expand the range of CSOs and areas for receiving state support for project funding.

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2021 CSO METER

Regional scores

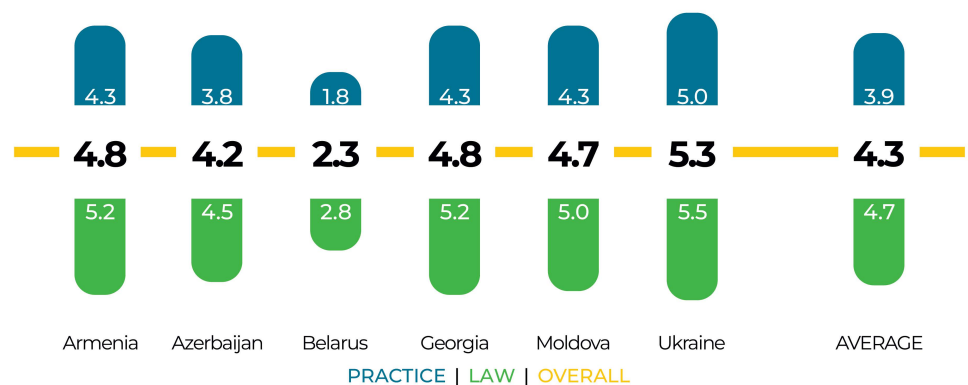


For the first time the 2021 CSO Meter reports in each of the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries gave **scores on the CSO environment** for the period of September 2020 – December 2021. The full regional report and the country reports are available at <https://csometer.info/>, while the latest CSO environment updates for the region are also shared on Twitter at [#CSOMeter](https://twitter.com/CSOMeter).

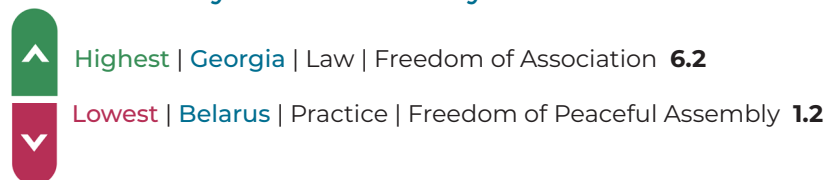
Scores run between 1 and 7 (with 1 representing the lowest possible score, or extremely unfavourable CSO environment while 7 represents the highest possible score) and are provided separately for Law and for Practice under each of the 11 areas of civil society operation. The final score in each area is calculated as a combination of the researchers' score (50 per cent) and the average Advisory Board members' score (50 per cent).

Ukraine had the most favourable CSO environment in the region (5.3), while Belarus the most unfavourable environment (2.3).

2021 CSO Meter Scores: Civil society environment in the EaP



The highest and lowest scores in any area or country in the 2021 CSO Meter:



Areas with **highest scores** across all countries:

Freedom of Association	4.9
Equal Treatment	4.6
Right to Participation in Decision-Making	4.5

Areas with **lowest scores** across all countries:

Digital Rights	4.1
State-CSO Cooperation	4.1
State Support	4.0

Areas with the **highest discrepancy** between Law and Practice:

	Right to Privacy	1.5
	Freedom of Expression	1.1
	State Duty to Protect	0.9

The tables below provide a more detailed overview of the 2021 scores per country, and per area in Law and Practice:

AREA												
Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
Armenia	5.7	4.9	5.4	5.3	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.8
Azerbaijan	4.0	3.6	3.0	3.9	4.6	4.3	4.4	4.6	4.3	4.5	4.7	4.2
Belarus	2.4	2.8	2.4	1.6	2.7	2.0	2.7	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.2	2.3
Georgia	6.1	5.6	5.7	4.6	4.8	4.9	3.9	4.4	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.8
Moldova	5.5	4.6	5.2	5.2	4.8	5.0	4.4	4.6	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.7
Ukraine	5.9	5.9	5.1	5.2	5.4	5.3	4.7	5.1	4.8	5.5	5.2	5.3
Average	4.9	4.6	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.1	4.3

LEGISLATION												
Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
Armenia	5.8	5.0	5.8	5.7	5.3	5.1	5.8	5.3	4.2	4.3	4.9	5.2
Azerbaijan	4.5	3.8	3.2	4.4	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.6	4.7	4.9	4.5
Belarus	2.9	3.2	2.7	1.9	3.2	2.4	3.6	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
Georgia	6.2	5.8	6.0	5.2	5.2	5.6	4.6	4.9	4.4	4.2	4.6	5.2
Moldova	5.6	4.8	5.6	5.4	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.0	4.6	4.2	4.3	5.0
Ukraine	5.9	5.9	5.3	5.3	5.7	6.0	5.0	5.3	5.0	5.9	5.5	5.5
Average	5.1	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.7

PRACTICE												
Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
Armenia	5.6	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.3	4.3	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.6	3.5	4.3
Azerbaijan	3.5	3.4	2.8	3.3	4.1	3.6	3.8	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.4	3.8
Belarus	1.9	2.3	2.0	1.2	2.2	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.9	2.0	1.6	1.8
Georgia	6.0	5.4	5.3	3.9	4.3	4.1	3.1	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.9	4.3
Moldova	5.3	4.4	4.7	5.0	4.3	4.6	3.4	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.9	4.3
Ukraine	5.9	5.8	4.8	5.1	5.0	4.5	4.4	4.9	4.6	5.0	4.8	5.0
Average	4.7	4.3	4.1	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.9

Legend:

- 1 Freedom of Association | 2 Equal Treatment | 3 Access to Funding | 4 Freedom of Peaceful Assembly |
- 5 Right to Participation in Decision-Making | 6 Freedom of Expression | 7 Right to Privacy |
- 8 State Duty to Protect | 9 State Support | 10 State-CSO Cooperation | 11 Digital rights

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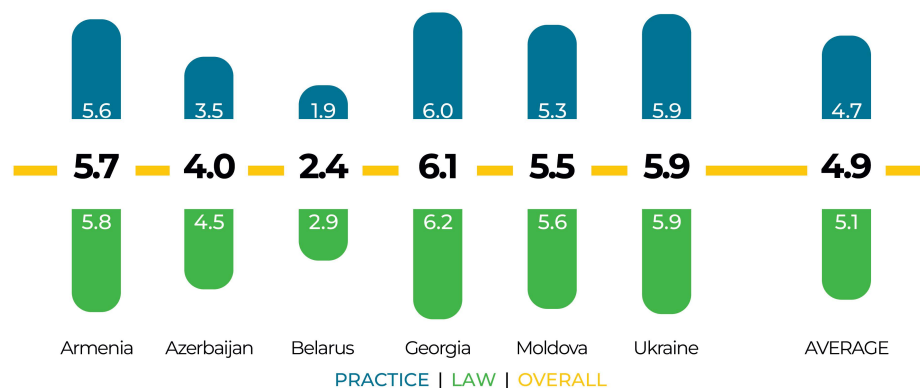
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CSO Meter 2021

Freedom of Association: Area with highest score

Area 1. Freedom of Association



Georgia had the highest score in freedom of association out of all the six countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region for both Law (6.2) and Practice. (6.0). Belarus had the lowest score among the six countries (2.4), indicating a highly restrictive and unfavourable environment for association.

Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have laws and practices that allow for easy registration

and operation of civil society organisations (CSOs). Everyone can freely establish, join, or participate in a CSO. CSOs can determine their objectives and operate inside and outside of the country, and they are free from state interference. The procedure to register a CSO as a legal entity is clear, simple, quick, and inexpensive, and operating an unregistered association is possible.

The EaP region has several **good practices related to the registration process**, for e.g., registration in 1 day in Georgia, online registration in Georgia and Ukraine or free registration in Moldova and Ukraine.







	Type of CSO	No. of founders	Capital for establishment in EUR	Registration fee	Registration processing time	On-line reg.
ARM	Public organisation	2 or more	No	18 EUR	10 working days	No
	Foundation	1 or more				
AZ	Public organisation	2 or more	No	5.5 EUR	30-60 working days	No
	Foundation	1 or more	5,000 EUR			
BLR	Public association	10 citizens (local) 50 citizens (national)	No	40 EUR (local) 80 EUR (national and international)	1 month	No
	Foundation	1 or more	800 EUR (local) 8,000 EUR (national and international)	40 EUR (local) 80 EUR (national and international)	1 month	
	Private institution	1 individual or one legal person	No	4 EUR		
GEO	Non-entrepreneurial legal entity (NELE)	1 individual	No	30 EUR (standard procedure) 60 EUR (urgent procedure)	Standard: 1 working day Urgent: same day	Yes
MD	Public association	2 or more	No	Free	15 days	No
	Foundation	1 or more	No express provision (minimal, e.g., 5 EUR)			
	Private institution	1	900 EUR			
	Association in the form of local action group	3 or more	No			
UKR	Public Association	2 or more	No requirement	Free	3 days	Yes
	Charitable organisation	2 or more			24 hours	

CSO Meter 2021

Freedom of Association: Area with highest score



Two countries trail behind in this area: Azerbaijan and Belarus. In Belarus, foreigners cannot establish CSOs, and unregistered associations are forbidden with severe criminal punishments for violation. The authorities have also forcibly liquidated prominent CSOs and numerous CSOs have been forced to self-liquidate, and/or relocate and continue their activities from abroad for security reasons. In Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Justice continues to create illegal obstacles to registration in practice and often refuses to register CSOs. This is visible in the low number of registered CSOs in the two countries.

	Country	Number of CSOs	CSOs per 10,000 inhabitants
	Armenia	6,983	23.6
	Azerbaijan	4,766	4.7
	Belarus	3,205	3.5
	Georgia	29,040	78
	Moldova	11,486	44
	Ukraine	160,000	16

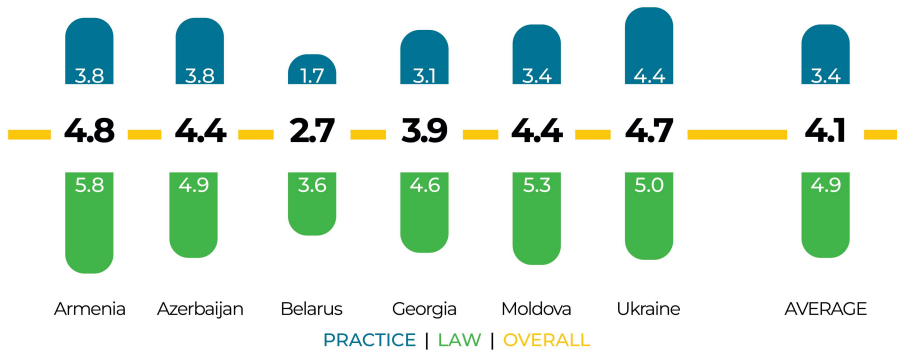
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Right to privacy: Area with largest discrepancy between Law and Practice

Area 7. Right to Privacy



Armenia had the highest overall score on Right to Privacy (4.8). Yet, it also had the largest discrepancy between Law (5.8) and Practice (3.8). Similarly, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine had their worst Practice scores in this area out of all CSO Meter areas. As a result, this was the area with the lowest average score for Practice among all areas. Belarus had the lowest score in right to privacy (2.7).

Right to privacy is guaranteed in law in all countries of the region.

However, these guarantees are a

long way from being implemented in practice. Several countries, including Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine noted an increase in surveillance practices by the government and the leaking of CSOs’ private data and personal information of associated individuals. There is lack of clarification of the reasons behind the use of technology such as surveillance or wiretapping, or ensuring any effective investigation, or accountability against such developments. Here are some of the challenges and scandals related to the right to privacy:

In **Azerbaijan**, CSOs were obliged to provide the Ministry of Finance with passport information of individual donors during the year.

In **Belarus**, authorities repeatedly violated the privacy of CSOs, activists and associated individuals. The gruesome cases ranged from physical and mental torture, harassment to other type of threats. For example, authorities applied torture to obtain a password for a smartphone or a chat group, examined the smartphones during arrests and detentions; seized all data storage and communication devices, during searches at private homes.

In **Moldova**, the Prosecutor’s Office confirmed illegal collection of information about the private life of over 50 persons in the so-called case of illegal surveillance and interception of opposition representatives, civic activists, and journalists, using special technical means of investigation for secretly obtaining information, as well as violation of the right to secrecy of telephone conversations.

In **Georgia**, a huge scandal erupted – there was alleged covert surveillance of citizens by the State Security Service, including the transcripts of phone conversations of CSO representatives, journalists, diplomats, clergy, and other personal private conversations. The State Inspector’s Service, responsible for monitoring the lawfulness of covert investigative actions, confirmed that the surveillance of the CSO representatives was not officially authorised and therefore was illegal.

For more information, please read the 2021 CSO Meter regional report available [here](#).

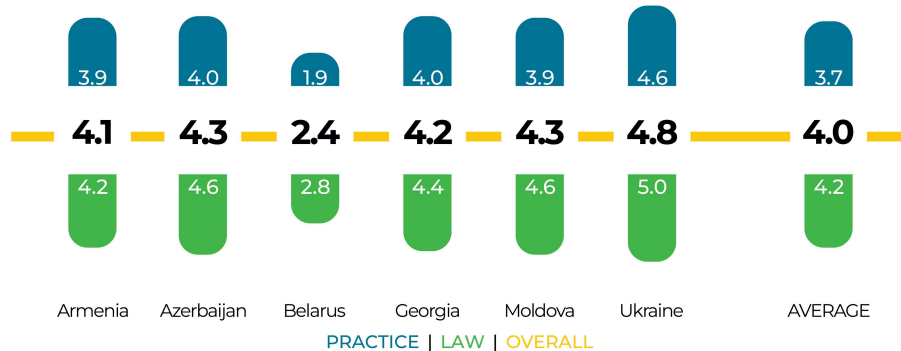
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CSO Meter 2021

State Support: Area with lowest overall score



Area 9. State Support



State Support scored the lowest for Law from all CSO Meter areas. Therefore, more efforts are needed to reform both state funding and the existing tax incentives for CSOs and their donors. Ukraine was the leader in the overall score (4.8), followed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. Armenia had a slightly lower score, while Belarus scored lowest.

The different types of state support remain underdeveloped in all the countries of the region. First, state funding for CSOs is insufficient

to substantially support the sustainability of CSOs, even though all countries apart from Belarus developed certain regulations and procedures for its allocation. Also, state funding is provided on a discretionary basis and state institutions fail to provide transparency and accountability in the allocation process. Second, tax benefits for CSOs and donors are very limited, with complicated and burdensome procedures for claiming them. Third, volunteerism was widely practiced and flourished during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, several countries have legislative gaps with unclear definitions of volunteerism and a lack of incentives for it.

Armenia and Ukraine improved the CSO-state funding allocation procedure. Moldova had several positive developments, such as an increase to CSOs' revenues from the percentage designation mechanism with 53 per cent as compared to the previous year. Also, lawyers, notaries, bailiffs, and mediators were granted the possibility to make percentage designations. A new regulation was adopted that allows the subsidisation of taxes for social enterprises that employ people with disabilities.

One way to support the development of philanthropy is for the state to provide incentives for donors. Only Ukraine has tax benefits for individual donations. However, the procedure is quite complicated in practice. The rest of the countries only provide certain incentives after corporate donations. The procedures, however, are complex and not functional which is one of the reasons that discourage many businesses from applying for tax exemptions.







State Support is a priority area in the region, with the **following key recommendations**:

- **Armenia:** Ensure CSO financial sustainability (increased, transparent, competitive and accountable state funding at the national and local levels; a more favourable tax environment).
- **Azerbaijan:** Simplify the registration of grants and donations and eliminate the need to report on small donations (e.g., 110 EUR per donor per year).
- **Georgia:** Develop unified legislative standards for state funding, encompassing clear guidelines for the award process.
- **Moldova:** Adjust the legal framework for public procurement to include a legal mechanism for contracting social services; Develop a unified mechanism for state funding of CSOs and transparency in the process of the assessment and monitoring of the vulnerability of CSOs to terrorist financing; Amend the Law on Philanthropy and Sponsorship to encourage philanthropic activities.
- **Ukraine:** Expand the range of CSOs receiving state support for project funding and expand the areas in which CSOs have access to funding (in addition to people with disabilities).

CSO Meter 2021

State Support: Area with lowest overall score



Country	Tax benefits for individual donors	Tax benefits for corporate donors
ARM 	No benefits are available	The assets, work or services provided to CSOs can be deducted from the profit tax base, but not more than in the amount of 0.25 per cent of the gross income within one financial year (applicable for donors such as companies, individual entrepreneurs, CSOs carrying out economic activities, etc.)
AZ 	No benefits are available	Up to 10 percent of the profit from the reporting year is free of taxation from 1 January 2019, for a period of 10 years if it is donated (via wire transfer) to enterprises, institutions and organisations involved in science, education, health, sports, or culture. Since March 2020, a mechanism was introduced for corporate social responsibility (CSR) for businesses to distribute the 10 percent. However, only CSOs in the sphere of culture will be able to comply with the criteria.
BLR 	No benefits are available	Tax deduction (in the amount not exceeding 10 per cent of gross profit) is available to corporate donors who provide aid only to public associations and foundations directly listed in the tax code (currently 17 organisations are listed there).
GEO 	No benefits are available	Legal entities can deduct the value of money, or the market value of free service/property gratuitously donated to charities in the maximum amount of up to 10 per cent of their taxable income.
MD 	No benefits are available	Donations are deductible up to 5 per cent of the taxable base.
UKR 	Charitable assistance in the form of funds, property, or services to CSOs can be deducted in an amount not exceeding 4 percent of taxable income During the quarantine regime the 4 per cent limitation was cancelled for income tax payers when providing charitable aid	The amount of provided charitable assistance can be asserted as an expense. However, if a legal entity earns over 700,000 EUR per year, such a legal entity is entitled to assert only 4 per cent of the income for the past year as an expense.

Individuals and legal entities who delivered goods, performed works, provided services to entities in the field of physical culture and sports, free of charge to apply a tax rebate of up to 8 per cent of income for the previous year. If the free supply of goods, works, services in other areas is made during the year, the amount of the tax rebate will be up to 4 per cent of income for the previous year.

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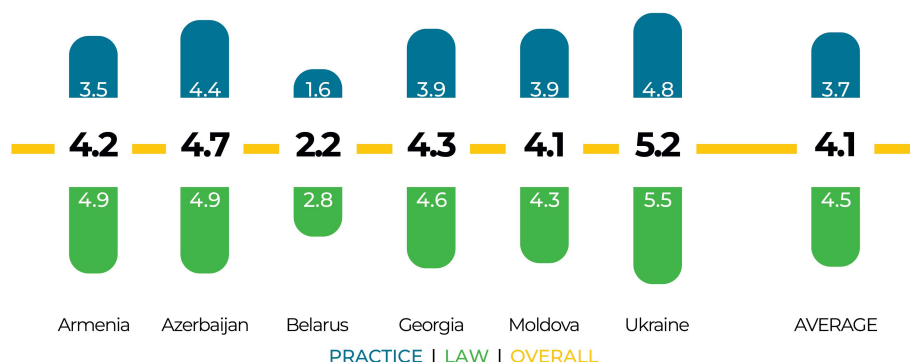


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Digital Rights: Emerging topic in the region



Area II. Digital Rights



The average scores for both Law and Practice in this area were among the lowest across all areas. Ukraine was the leader in Digital Rights, with protections for freedom of internet use, free expression of views and beliefs in the digital area, and many digital services and skills-building for the public. Conversely, Belarus demonstrated how the government can massively violate digital rights with the aim of restricting CSOs, activists and citizens.

Access to the internet is fundamental to exercising human rights online, especially freedom of expression, association, and assembly. In the region, only Georgia provides constitutional guarantees for internet access. In most of the countries, access to the internet is not specifically regulated. There is a lack of comprehensive data protection and privacy laws to protect CSOs' and users' online data against undue collection, processing, transfer, sale or retention of data. However, there are constitutional guarantees on privacy and different laws in each country, except for Belarus.

In several countries, the government has undertaken measures to prevent or disrupt individuals' exercise of digital rights. During the Nagorno-Karabakh War, there were limitations on access to digital tools such as social media and websites in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Belarus in May 2021, the government amended the Telecommunications Law to allow for shutting down or limiting the operation of telecommunications networks in response to alleged threats to national security involving the internet.

The governments rarely provide for participation and dialogue of different stakeholders, including civil society, when formulating and adopting strategic documents on digitalisation, digital technology, and AI:

Country	Strategic document and responsible institutions	Involvement of CSOs
ARM	Digitalization Strategy and Action Plan for 2021-2025	No significant involvement of CSOs Published on e-draft platform for public consultations
AZ	Government programme for the expansion of digital payments in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2018-2020 (expired) "Action Programme for the formation of 'e-government' in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2010-2011" (expired)	Documents state involvement of CSOs
BLR	State Programme 'Digital Development of Belarus' for 2021-2025	No involvement of CSOs
GEO	National Strategy – Digital Georgia (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development)	No involvement of CSOs
MD	National Strategy Digital Moldova 2020, expired (Deputy prime minister for digitalisation)	No information available
UKR	1) Concept for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in Ukraine (Ministry of Digital Transformation) 2) Information Security Strategy	1) Public discussion 2) No involvement of CSOs

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On the other hand, in all countries of the region, there are numerous cases of the use of digital technology to enable the exercise of various aspects of the CSO environment.

Different elements of the CSO environment

E-services/digital solutions

Establishment and on-line registration of CSOs	Online registration of CSOs is available in Ukraine and Georgia. In Azerbaijan, https://qht.gov.az/ is available only for amendments to the registration documents
Reporting (annual, taxes, etc.) of CSOs	Armenia: online platform for both tax and annual reporting Azerbaijan: https://www.e-gov.az/en for submission of annual reports Belarus: possible for tax and other reports Moldova: Financial reporting and other types of annual reporting Ukraine: Financial reporting and other types of annual reporting
Protest notification system	Moldova: Not provided by legislation. Technically available in Chisinau http://intruniri.chisinau.md/ . De facto used periodically.
Participation in decision-making	Armenia: e-draft.am (consultations on legal drafts) Belarus: https://forumpravo.by/ Moldova: https://particip.gov.md Ukraine: Vzaemo.Diia Platform (comment on Draft Laws and participate in discussions); Diia.Digital Community platform (public consultations, participatory budget, etc.)
Access to Information	Moldova: Requests to access information may be submitted online Armenia: e-request.am (unified platform for information requests, complaints, applications to any state body) Azerbaijan: Access to information can be submitted through www.e-gov.az and on various websites of most government agencies
State duty to protect	Armenia: e-rights.am (platform of the Human Rights Strategy)
State support (state funding, tax benefits, donations, volunteerism)	Armenia: armeps.am (for state grant applications, state procurement bids, and the relevant information) Azerbaijan: https://ngogrant.az/ by NGO Agency. Online submission of documents is available Ukraine: Vzaemo.Diia Platform (competition for CSO grants on specific issues)
Other e-services	Armenia: petition.am (submitting petitions) Georgia: My.gov.ge (Unified Portal of Electronic Services; Emergency hotline (112) mobile app (victims of violence) Moldova: http://e-services.md/ (portal of electronic services), online petitioning, https://guvern24.md/ , https://www.particip.md/ (crowd funding) Armenia: e-register.am (for information on registration and registered entities, as well as online registration for business), e-citizen.am (for citizens to check their state-owned data), e-gov.am (information on government decisions, reports, registers, etc.), arlis.am (database of all legal acts with amendments incorporated), gnahatir.am (for assessment of state-provided services), datalex.am (electronic database of court decisions), etc. Azerbaijan: www.e-gov.az - centralised portal of e-government services

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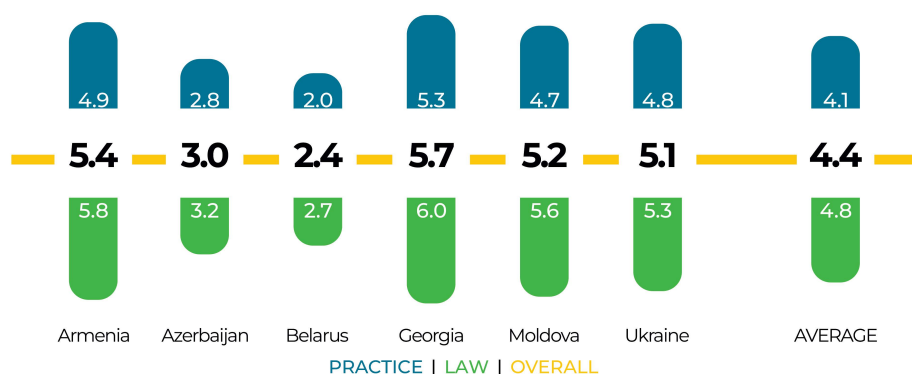


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Access to Funding: Area with lowest scores in two countries



Area 3. Access to Funding



Belarus and Azerbaijan had a low score, equal or below 3 (1-7, 1 being the lowest), in the area of Access to Funding. Georgia was the leader in this area in both Law and Practice.

In most of the countries of the region CSOs are free to seek, receive, and use financial and material resources for the pursuit of their objectives. Azerbaijan and Belarus are exceptions to this trend. Below we provide a list of the limitations to CSOs' access to funding in these two countries that contradict international standards.

In Belarus:

- Restrictions are imposed on both foreign donations and donations from Belarusian corporate donors, both financial and in-kind.
- The procedure for the receipt, registration, and use of gratuitous foreign aid is difficult and burdensome and usually results in refusal. Since the end of 2021, amendments to laws further tightened the definitions of foreign donors (to include Belarusian citizens permanently residing outside of Belarus for more than 183 days out of 12 months) as well as foreign anonymous donors (which includes not only the anonymous donors, but also the individual that did not reveal the donor's identity in a relevant payment document).
- Public associations cannot independently conduct entrepreneurial activities.
- Public associations are banned from having bank accounts and from keeping money abroad.
- The leaders of CSOs that organised crowdfunding and used other digital fundraising tools to support people that suffered from brutality and political repression have been imprisoned and subject to criminal charges (e.g., *MolaMola* and the fundraising campaigns *BySol* and *Byhelp*).

In Azerbaijan:

- Anonymous donations, donations from foreigners and stateless persons and cash donations exceeding 110 EUR are prohibited.
- Only charities can receive cash donations, despite the lack of a clear procedure for obtaining the status of a charity.
- The passport details of each donor, even for a donation of just 20 cents, must be recorded and submitted to the Ministry of Finance.
- CSOs' access to foreign grants, donations and service contracts has been seriously impeded since 2014 when several restrictive provisions were introduced for foreign donors (i.e., the requirement to have representation in Azerbaijan, to sign a special agreement with the MoJ and to prove the economic-financial expediency of the project).

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