

STORIES OF CHANGE FROM THE CSO METER MONITORING

Charting the path to a more
supportive environment for civil society



Civil society organisations across the Eastern Partnership countries have spearheaded democratic reforms. They have provided support to vulnerable communities, acted as watchdogs by monitoring elections and created a conducive environment for civic action. During challenging times, these organisations have come together to minimise or eliminate undue restrictions, safeguarding people's rights and freedoms.

For almost a decade, the CSO Meter project has monitored laws and practices affecting civil society's work in the region, providing essential analysis and bringing CSOs together to advocate for democratic change. The project is supported by the European Union.

Discover how the CSO Meter is driving change across the region!



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INTRODUCTION

What does the CSO Meter do?

- **Monitors civic space in the EaP region with a unique methodology**, developed with input from 807+ organisations and activists from the 6 countries to meet their needs.
- **Builds a civil society community**: The CSO Meter Hub is a vibrant community of 25 organisations across the 6 countries that collectively monitor and advocate for an improved civil society environment. Through the Hub, CSOs gain access to tools, guidance and knowledge to proactively address civic space challenges and share best practices.
- **Takes action for change**: CSO Meter Hub members use findings from reports, early warnings and trends to engage in evidence-based advocacy campaigns, policymaking, and reforms to improve civil society conditions.

Why is the CSO Meter an important resource for the EU?

- Provides robust, evidence-based monitoring and expertise that **informs key EU reports**, including the enlargement package and country progress reports.
- Shapes **civil society roadmaps and funding priorities** for the EU country-level calls.
- Presents **emerging trends** to EU institutions and delegations, enhancing policy dialogue.
- Serves as **best practice for monitoring**: in 2021, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights recommended adapting the CSO Meter to monitor civic space challenges in EU countries.

FROM INSIGHTS TO IMPACT: ACTION POWERED BY THE CSO METER

CSO Meter monitoring and recommendations have been used across diverse contexts – already delivering tangible results:

When the environment is favourable to civil society:

Armenia

Catalysing volunteering:

Removing excessive regulation and introducing additional benefits, the new Law on Volunteering (2023) allows organisations to harness the power of volunteer labour while providing essential protections for volunteers themselves.

Strengthening public participation for better policies:

CSO Meter recommendations led to adding a new fifth pillar on participatory governance in Armenia's Public Administration Reform strategy (2023). Among other measures, the amended strategy provided for the creation of a dedicated department at the Office of the Prime Minister (2024), aimed to institutionalise open government principles and support civil society development. Further steps to improve public participation are being taken now, facilitated by the CSO Meter Action Pooled Fund.

Improving transparency in state funding for CSOs:

Improved procedures for allocating state grants and subsidies (2019-2021) increased transparency and accountability, making the selection process fairer and eliminating conflict of interest.

Moldova

Resisting repeated attempts to introduce limitations of freedom of association:

Harmful limitations on civil society association, participation and operation were removed from the Law on Noncommercial Organisations (2020), protecting people's right to get together and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Revoking ban on public assemblies:

A series of advocacy actions led to the revocation of excessive and unlawful limitations on public assemblies imposed during the pandemic (2021).

Clarifying the legal status of philanthropy:

CSO Meter Hub members as part of a CSO coalition directly contributed to the drafting of the law (2022) that provides clear terms around donations and philanthropic activity. The law allows philanthropy to become a significant source of funding for civil society in Moldova.



Ukraine

Promoting cooperation between state and civil society:

CSO Meter monitoring identified practices to strengthen Ukraine's civic sector and promote partnership between CSOs and authorities. The recommendations contributed to the National Civil Society Development Strategy (2021-2026) and two Action plans about its implementation, which consider best practices, such as ensuring regular monitoring of progress.

Preventing restrictive laws on foreign funding, anti-money laundering and lobbying:

CSO Meter Hub members and ECNL played a crucial role in countering restrictive CSO regulations, which would have hindered CSOs' advocacy and stigmatised foreign-funded organisations. Since 2020, the CSO Meter partnership has provided comparative analyses and international legal perspectives on lobbying, enabling Ukrainian CSOs to strategically challenge repeated restrictive proposals. CSOs also took action to combat existing and prevent new unintended consequences of anti-money laundering and countering terrorism financing measures affecting the sector.

Improving state funding for organisations of people with disabilities:

A new decree extended competition-based state funding principle to organisations supporting people with disabilities. This reform ensures more equal conditions, and open space for delivery of high-quality services by all disability-focused organisations.

When the environment is unfavourable to civil society:

Azerbaijan

Maintaining state cooperation with civil society in a challenging environment:

The OGP Action Plan 2020-2022 incorporated CSO Meter recommendations on freedom of association and public participation. These included simplifying CSO and grant registration and strengthening public councils. Amid restrictions on association and funding, this was a positive step toward cooperation between authorities and civil society.

Partnering with businesses for an improved environment:

In 2022, partners held a series of discussions leading to a joint CSO-business platform to enhance cooperation with state institutions and strengthen public-private partnerships.

When the environment is unfavourable to civil society:

Belarus

Civil society in Belarus has been facing continuous human rights violations, arrests and forced liquidation. Many organisations operate from exile. Even in this context, they continue to advocate to improve the conditions in the country.

When the environment is unfavourable to civil society:

Georgia

Delaying the Foreign Agents law:

Since 2023, CSO Meter Hub members engaged in advocacy efforts, provided legal arguments in the campaign ‘No Russian Law’, mobilised civil society and informed the public about the law’s negative consequences. Through a dedicated webpage on CSOgeorgia, they reached over 72,000 viewers with essential information and recommendations during the protests.

Preventing restrictions in the context of anti-terrorism legislation:

CSO Meter Hub members engaged with the Financial Monitoring Unit to discuss CSO self-regulation, transparency and civil society's role in preventing anti-money laundering and terrorism financing ahead of the 2023 FATF risk assessment process. In this process, civil society increased knowledge and connections with the Central Bank and the Bank Association of Georgia.

Continued international advocacy in the face of rising repression:

Despite extreme restrictions and a volatile environment, civil society in Georgia stands as one of the last remaining democratic actors in the country. Organisations continue to coordinate efforts, support each other, communicate with international bodies and are preparing an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

WHAT'S NEXT?

It does not end here – CSO Meter continues to power essential reforms for the region.

CSO Meter Hub is currently working to improve:

- **Public participation** (for example, in the early stages of policy making in Armenia);
- **Access to funding** (for organisations in Belarus, as well as efficiency of humanitarian aid delivery in Ukraine);
- **Emerging issues with opportunities for change**, such as AML/CFT, protests, SLAPPs, digital rights (for example, in Moldova, where a platform facilitating dialogue on digital rights between businesses, CSOs and the state has been launched);
- **Protection and preparedness** (ability of CSOs to represent public interest in court in Armenia, actions countering foreign agents laws).

Do you want to power further action?
Contribute to the CSO Meter Action Pooled Fund!

WHAT DOES THE CSO METER OFFER YOU?

Early Warning Updates

Stay informed about relevant changes and developments in each country, facilitated by expert monitoring on the ground.



Annual Country Reports and Regional Reports



Dive deep into detailed analyses of all changes that happened in law and practice, and concrete recommendations for institutions.

CSO Meter Roundup

Sign up for the quarterly newsletter summarising all the key news and insights. Scan the QR code to subscribe.



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