

CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ANALYSIS OF CSO SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS

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CSO Sustainability Index (CSOSI) Analysis Report

Analysis of CSO Sustainability Trends: 2010-2022

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INTRODUCTION

The Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to measure the sustainability of countries' civil society organizations (CSOs). From 1997 to 2023, the CSOSI covered a total of 82 countries across Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (from 1997), sub-Saharan Africa (from 2009), the Middle East and North Africa (from 2011), Afghanistan and Pakistan (from 2011), Asia (from 2014), and Mexico (from 2018). Countries were measured annually on a scale from 1 (best) to 7 (worst) in each of seven dimensions of a CSO sector's sustainability: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. These seven scores were averaged to create an overall CSO sustainability score.

The annual process of developing the CSOSI involved a local Implementing Partner in each country, expert panels that these partners would convene, and a Washington, DC-based Editorial Committee that included regionally based experts as well. The local expert panels were the primary scorers; they were provided with a list of 'indicators' to guide understanding of the scope of each dimension. The guidance provided to standardize scoring decisions across the countries covered by the CSOSI evolved over the years, but from 2013 forward guided panels to determine proposed scores based on the degree to which the situation in each dimension has changed relative to the previous year. In any given year, a 0.1 change in score was meant to correlate with a slight improvement or deterioration in that dimension in the preceding calendar year. While there was recalibration of the exact terminology over time, score changes of 0.2 or more were reserved for situations of more significant change.

From 2017 to 2023, USAID awarded FHI 360 a cooperative agreement to develop the CSOSI. This report, produced upon the CSOSI's completion and alongside FHI 360's final report, provides an analysis of some trends identified in the CSOSI's scores and reports. A few caveats must be made for this analysis. The first is on its scope – it was determined that to analyze global trends, the analysis should begin with the 2010 CSOSI, when the CSOSI first began to cover countries outside of its original region of focus, Europe and Eurasia (E&E). The time scope continues through the final edition of the index, the 2022 CSOSI. While all years past 2013 covered more than 70 countries, and the final year (2022) only covered 15 countries, it was included because the 15 countries cross-cut two regions (E&E and sub-Saharan Africa) and because we felt that an audience would be interested in the most recent findings and scores from these countries. Another caveat involves baseline recalibration – there were 16 dimension-level scores that were rescored based on the 1-7 scale instead of the level of change to better reflect the situation in the country and better align them with other countries in the region. These were primarily done for the 2018 CSOSI (14 of 16 cases). However, when discussing the 'most improved' or 'most deteriorated' country in each dimension, the baseline recalibrations create breaks in the longitudinal data that would skew the lists and so these

countries were removed from those lists where their presence would have been purely attributable to baseline recalibration.

The nine stories below elucidate some trends from the CSOSI's data and reports. The first two are country-specific, telling the stories of the countries whose overall score improved and deteriorated the most. The next seven stories describe trends that arose across regions and across years in each of the seven dimensions.

We hope you find these stories interesting and informative. If you would like to further explore the CSOSI, all historical data and reports can be found and downloaded from csosi.org.

THE GAMBIA'S CSO SUSTAINABILITY MOST IMPROVED

Among the 82 countries assessed from 2010 to 2022 with respect to CSO sustainability, The Gambia showed the most improvement, moving from an Overall CSO Sustainability score of 5.7 (in the “sustainability impeded” tier) to a score of 4.7 (in the “sustainability evolving” tier). In fact, The Gambia went from the third-lowest overall sustainability score in sub-Saharan Africa in 2012 to the third-highest in 2022. During that time, CSO sustainability improved in all seven dimensions, with the greatest gains in advocacy, organizational capacity, and legal environment. Ushering in this major advancement in CSO sustainability was the end of 21 years of autocratic rule in December 2016.



End of autocratic rule opened civic space for advocacy

Advocacy improved the most of all of the dimensions (5.0 to 3.6). Despite largely dictatorial rule in The Gambia since a 1994 military coup, at the start of the last decade, thousands of CSOs—registered as charitable organizations—were frequently collaborating with the central and local governments in the delivery of social services, particularly in education, agriculture, and health, as well as participating in consultative fora or on steering committees. However, CSO input during such engagements was largely marginalized. CSOs conducted soft lobbying and used non-confrontational advocacy tactics such as dialogue, interpersonal engagements, and writing letters. There was no tolerance for CSOs addressing broader governance and human rights issues by the autocratic regime of Yahya Jammeh, and CSOs faced harassment, arbitrary arrests, detentions without trial, and threats of closure, leading to self-censorship by many groups and an overall climate of fear. That said, there were slight improvements in advocacy between 2014 and 2016, as CSOs at both the national and local levels were increasingly involved in advocating for the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities. For example, in 2015, Think Young Women and other groups launched awareness raising campaigns to abolish female

genital mutilation, resulting in the government declaring a countrywide ban on the practice that year. Furthermore, owing to the combined efforts of a number of CSOs, the National Assembly amended the Children’s Act 2005 in July 2016 to prohibit child marriage in The Gambia.

The civic landscape encountered a major defining moment in the lead up to the presidential elections in December 2016. Political activists staged a peaceful protest in April of that year, highlighting the government’s poor human rights records. The government responded with a violent crackdown, causing a fundamental change in the political landscape, with groups coalescing in a large opposition coalition. On December 1, when President Jammeh rejected his defeat in the elections, Gambian CSOs responded with a barrage of public statements calling for him to step down. After widespread unrest, international calls for the president’s resignation, and an international military coalition of West African states entering The Gambia to address the situation, Jammeh stepped down on January 21, 2017, paving the way for the presidency of opposition candidate Adama Barrow.

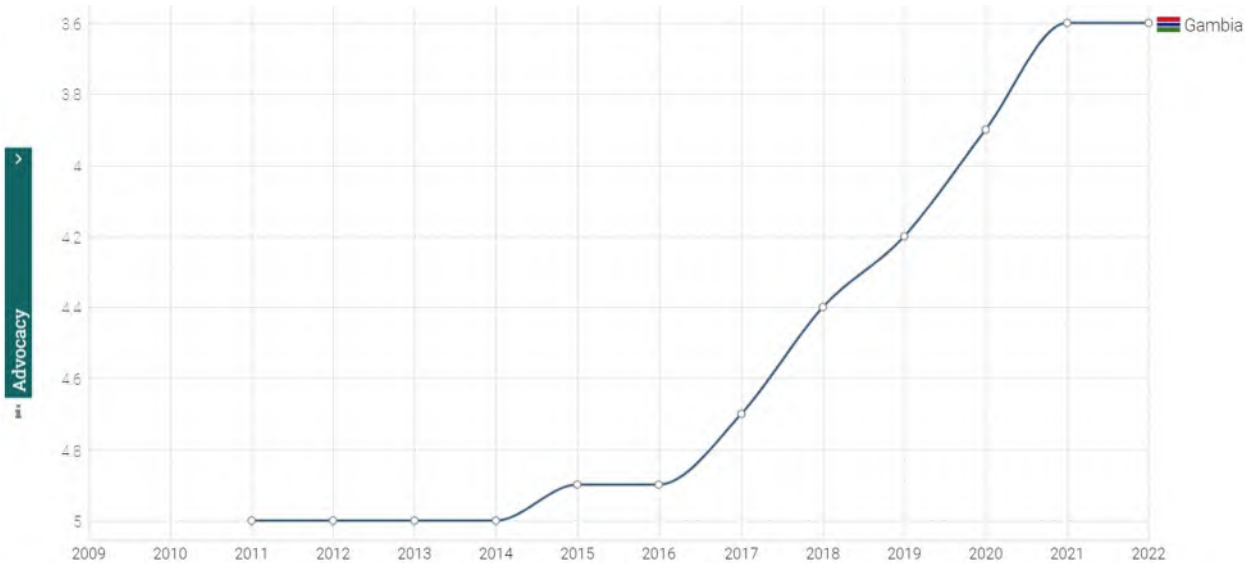
The transfer of power by popular election greatly opened civic space and facilitated the proliferation of human rights-focused and other advocacy organizations. With their newfound freedoms, advocacy CSOs became more vocal about public policies and more exacting about holding public institutions to account, and they started to see some victories. In 2017, a youth environmental association mobilized communities to protest a dumpsite releasing dangerous fumes into nearby settlements. The protest led to the temporary suspension of dumping at the site. Other CSOs organized protests against a Chinese fishmeal company, which resulted in the temporary closure of the facility and a court case against the company filed by the National Environment Agency.

Many officials in the new government had backgrounds in civil society, facilitating collaboration on critical governance issues. For example, CSO representatives took part in the Truth, Reparation, and Reconciliation Commission and National Human Rights Commission and were members of the Constitutional Review Commission. Although CSOs were able to form coalitions, they did have trouble sustaining their efforts and responding to issues consistently. For example, the CSO community lacked consensus on the best strategy to address the controversial issue of presidential term limits, thus failing to mobilize citizens around the issue. The advocacy score remaining in the “sustainability evolving” tier reflected these challenges.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the score for advocacy continued to improve (3.9 in 2020 to 3.6 in 2021). CSOs acted as a major voice on issues of increasing public concern during the pandemic, such as corruption, the abuse of office, and inefficient service delivery, with a number of successes. When a civil society activist was arrested and charged with disseminating false information at a Black Lives Matter protest, CSOs decried the arrest, prompting the police to drop the charges. After several media houses published articles exposing government corruption and abuse of office, CSO activism led to the suspension of the Minister of Fisheries and Water Resources for allegedly taking bribes from Chinese companies.

By 2021, CSOs had consolidated their participation in public life. During the 2021 election period, CSOs promoted voter registration, conducted voter education, and deployed hundreds of election observers, enhancing compliance with national and international electoral standards and generating public trust in the electoral process. The government’s invitation to CSOs to take part in the constitution-building process acknowledged their value in governance.

In 2022, CSOs’ advocacy improvements were further displayed after the tragic death of over 83 children after consuming contaminated cough syrup. CSOs staged several protests and organized the children’s parents into the Justice for 66+ Campaign, which demanded that the government investigate the medication’s import and sale. The government responded with a police investigation, an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to mandate an investigation by the health committee, and the establishment of a presidential task force, with inclusion of civil society.



Organizational capacity benefited from political openings and funding competition

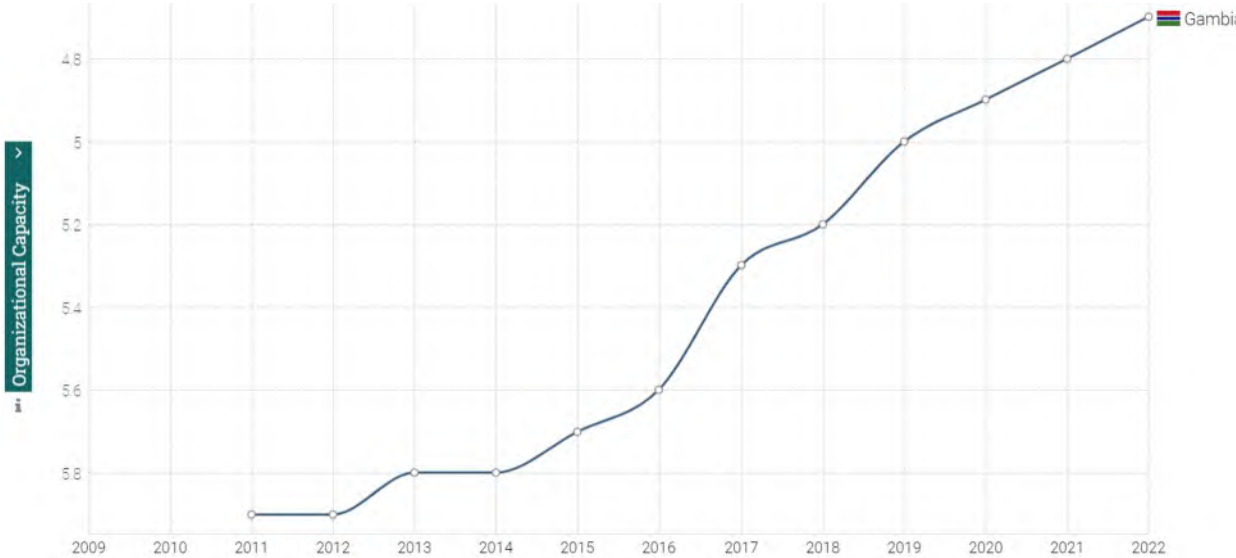
Organizational capacity saw the second greatest score improvement (5.9 to 4.7) of the seven dimensions. Throughout the last decade, estimates of the number of charitable organizations were in the thousands but only 125 were registered as NGOs with the NGO Affairs Agency,¹ largely due to more onerous requirements with minimal benefits. Despite a difference in baseline organizational capacity between larger CSOs (about 10 percent of the sector), which had more defined management structures and larger staff sizes, and smaller CSOs, which were challenged with poor work conditions, a dependence on volunteers, and inadequate equipment, the sector as a whole demonstrated improvements. Even during the government’s

¹ The number of registered NGOs with the NGO Affairs Agency remained at 125 in reports from 2011-2022.

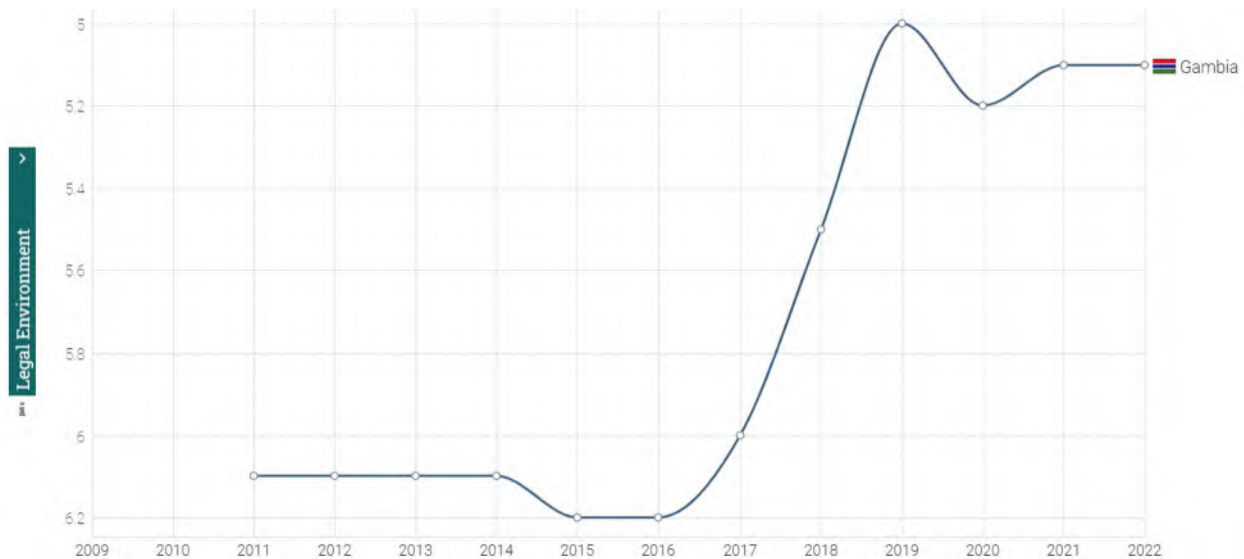
autocratic rule, The Gambia’s country reports indicated that many CSOs were still managing to upgrade their organizational systems incrementally to become more transparent, efficient, and responsive and to develop stronger relationships with their constituencies, which led to mobilizing local networks for various causes. For example, the Gambia Teachers Union rapidly expanded its constituency to more than 20,000 members and the Child Protection Alliance established committees and clubs in communities and at schools that were at the forefront of local child protection.

The opening of civic space in 2016 created the impetus for a more marked improvement in the sector’s ability to build and sustain broad-based coalitions. By 2017, CSOs’ organizational capacity was stronger as the political transition energized them to become more proactive, and competition for donor funding encouraged them to be better organized. Overall, CSOs were more assertive in mobilizing their members and communities to stage protests or demonstrations. The most significant constituency building effort was the emergence of the Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations, which sought accountability from the former government for hundreds of victims of torture, rape, enforced disappearance, and summary execution. In 2018, the rapid increase in the number of CSOs further intensified competition for funding and forced CSOs to improve their organizational capacities to obtain support, including using websites and social media platforms.

The organizational capacity score continued to improve incrementally through 2022, as CSOs’ passion and commitment allowed them to build constituencies, engage communities, and expand their programs and activities; utilize Internet-based technology during COVID restrictions; and further develop coalitions around constitution building, anti-corruption, and transitional justice. The African Network Against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED) was emblematic of this: founded in 2019 and run mainly by women human rights activists, the organization succeeded in building an internationally recognized memorial house to document and inform the public about enforced disappearances.



Government enforcement of restrictive legislation impacted legal environment



From 2010-2022, the legal environment dimension improved by an overall score of 1.0 (from 6.1 to 5.1).² There was marked improvement between 2017 and 2019, as the transfer of power by popular election in December 2016 established a government which limited enforcement of restrictive legislation towards civil society. Throughout most of the reporting period, the legal environment for Gambian CSOs was largely shaped by the NGO Decree 81 of 1996, which required CSO activities to align with the policies and priorities of the government and gave the government the ability to refuse NGO registration or close down organizations without appeal. The government’s execution of that decree shaped the overall environment for the sector.

Up until 2016, the government displayed virtually zero tolerance for criticism and used the law to arrest and detain activists and to close organizations. CSOs became aware in late 2015 that parliament had passed a “new” NGO Act, which essentially copied the old decree. After the ousting of the Jammeh dictatorship in December 2016, Gambians enjoyed many new opportunities to exercise their civil liberties, despite the constrictive legislation remaining on the books. The freer political environment starting in 2017 facilitated the registration of a large number of organizations within a short period, many of which focused on human rights, accountability, corruption, and governance. In May 2018, the Gambian Supreme Court ruled that the criminalization of “defamation, false publication on the Internet, and sedition”—except with respect to the president or when it affects the administration of justice—was unconstitutional.

² The score for legal environment was recalibrated from 5.5 in 2018 to 5.0 in 2019 to better reflect the situation in the country and align it with other scores in the region. The total improvement in the overall CSO sustainability score from 2011-2022 would have remained the same even without this recalibration, and thus The Gambia still deserves the title of most improved country.

CSOs experienced a significant victory in 2020 with the drafting and presentation to the National Assembly of an Access to Information Bill (ATI), and its enactment in 2021. This was the first time Gambian CSOs led in drafting legislation and the bill supported CSOs' efforts to combat corruption and abuse of power and promote responsive service delivery. However, the legal environment's trend of improving scores leveled off in 2019 as the government used the controversial Public Order Act to clamp down violently on some protesters seeking to hold the government and businesses to account and denied permits to CSOs to protest. While the CSO sector's road to sustainability is now free from the obstructions of the Jammeh regime, it is clear that, like everywhere, the sector's gains will continue to be hard fought, and linear progress cannot be taken for granted.

HUNGARY'S CSO SUSTAINABILITY MOST DETERIORATED

Of the 82 countries tracked on seven dimensions of CSO sustainability from 2010-2022, Hungary deteriorated the most (by 1.2 in overall CSO sustainability). At the start of 2010, while a number of Hungarian CSOs were small and struggled with organizational capacity, many were receiving state funding to provide social services; they were participating in policy input mechanisms such as the Consultative Forum on Employment; donors were supporting the sector with clear selection criteria; and civil society groups were working relatively freely, with a judicial system to utilize if problems arose.

From 1998 to 2008, Hungary had the strongest legal environment score in all of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (with an overall score of 1.0-1.5) but had fallen to 4.0 by 2022. Between 2010 and 2018, independent CSOs increasingly faced a more restrictive legal environment, harassment and intimidation by the government, a deteriorating financial environment, and growing public apathy to participation in the face of constricting civic space. In addition to the drops in Legal Environment, the advocacy score fell by 1.3, and financial viability, sectoral infrastructure, and public image deteriorated as well (by 0.9 each). Dimension scores flatlined or declined further from 2018-2022. A number of factors contributed to setbacks to CSO sustainability in Hungary, with the dominant one being the right-wing Fidesz political party winning a supermajority in the 2010 election followed by increasingly authoritarian rule, government harassment of independent CSOs, funding limitations, and overall public disillusionment.



Fidesz super-majority passed legislation to restrict civic participation

The two-thirds majority secured by the Fidesz party in the 2010, 2014, and 2018 elections not only allowed the government to pass legislation without consultations or broad public input—constraining civil society’s advocacy efforts and partnerships with the government—but it also

allowed the government to start imposing stricter regulations on the sector and to focus its engagement on pro-government groups and faith-based organizations. Soon after their 2010 victory, the party canceled contracts with social service NGOs and suspended the National Civil Fund’s grant giving (which had supported 10,000 NGOs). In 2012, the government passed a new Nonprofit Act creating a more challenging and uncertain legal environment for CSOs over the ensuing years, including providing authorities the right to control and inspect CSOs. They enacted a new Civil Code in 2013, requiring complex statute amendments on the part of CSOs to comply, and extending the personal liability of legal representatives for the organization’s financial obligations. A 2017 act “on the transparency of organizations supported from abroad,” modeled after Russia’s “foreign agent” law, required CSOs that received more than HUF 7.2 million from non-domestic sources on an annual basis to register with courts and label themselves as “foreign funded.” The government ignored a European Court of Justice ruling to repeal the legislation until 2021, when they replaced it with a new act on organizations “capable of influencing public life,” subjecting CSOs to inspections by the State Audit Body regardless of their funding source. CSOs’ ability to obtain legal and other technical support in addressing these various changes was also constrained by the limited capacity of a number of Civil Information Centers—which provide services to CSOs on grant applications, legal advice and networking—when the government failed to re-appoint qualified organizations in 2012 and subsequent selection processes.

Government increasingly harassed and intimidated independent CSOs



The government became more vocal in its harassment, intimidation, and polarization of the sector, including seizing documents in 2014 from reputable groups such as the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation; increasingly labeling CSOs who received donor funds as “foreign agents” and independent CSOs as “security threats”; placing journalists, lawyers and political and business figures under surveillance (revealed in the Pegasus surveillance scandal in

2021); and fining 16 CSOs that organized a campaign to invalidate an anti-LGBT referendum in 2022. Government harassment and intimidation negatively affected CSOs’ public image and organizational development as well, with groups less inclined to be transparent with their information amid concerns of increased government bureaucracy and crackdowns. While some municipalities demonstrated constructive dialogue with CSOs (i.e., Pécs municipal strategic development) earlier in the past decade, local authorities increasingly demanded some influence over CSO operations if funding their service provision and many started restricting CSO activities, particularly those linked to the Open Society Foundations after a backlash to immigration during the Syrian refugee influx in 2015.

Funding constraints to independent CSOs deepened



The financial viability of CSOs was constrained by a number of factors. The high debt, budget deficit, and slow economic growth over the early years of the past decade resulted in substantial cuts in state funding to virtually all sectors of civil society, from which many groups never recovered. The government’s nationalization of fields where many CSOs had traditionally provided services, particularly education and health, further dried up funding and government tenders became inaccessible to CSOs. In 2011, one of the primary funding mechanisms for civil society—the National Civil Fund—was replaced by the National Cooperation Fund. This new fund had more government involvement in distributing funds; a demonstrated preference for groups with political loyalty, churches, and sports organizations; and a greater administrative burden on CSOs receiving grants. Additional state funding mechanisms (the Village Civil Fund in 2020 and the City Civil Fund in 2021) also went to beneficiaries directly controlled by ruling party politicians or their affiliates. While the economy started to show positive growth and lower unemployment from 2017-2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, during which CSOs were left

out of the furlough schemes designed to maintain employees through lockdown, and high subsequent inflation constrained CSOs' ability to retain and hire staff.

While the private sector generally viewed CSOs as valuable partners with specialized knowledge and expertise until around 2014, a lack of tax benefits for donations, a shrinking economy, and businesses' increased concern of government backlash to partnering with independent CSOs created overall reductions in collaboration and more limited corporate donations and philanthropic activities.

On the donor side, EU Structural Funds shrunk and went towards more centrally-managed government projects. In addition, the government increasingly asserted its authority to influence grant decisions by the European Economic Area (EEA)/Norwegian NGO Fund, which ended all projects in 2016. A new round of funding was not implemented as of 2022 due to disagreements with the government over funding allocations and management, making Hungary the only country of the 15 eligible to be excluded. Likewise, the Swiss-Hungarian NGO Block Grant program ended in 2015. The one stable international donor—Open Society Foundations—faced significant government criticism for providing humanitarian relief to refugees and supporting an array of independent civil society groups and had to relocate its regional office to Berlin in 2018 given harassment and smear campaigns by authorities. While additional donor funding started to appear in 2019 through the EU's Community-Led Local Development program and Sigrid Rausing Trust, among others, they appeared to largely benefit more well-known CSOs.

Survival efforts by CSOs couldn't reverse overall setbacks

The economic difficulties put CSOs in survival mode. Most CSOs not considered "loyal" to the government lacked the resources to attract and retain sufficient professional staff, undertake strategic planning, or work on constituency building. More of the already well-established, independent, largely Budapest-based CSOs tried to demonstrate resilience over the past decade. Some groups became savvier at using social media (i.e., the Migration Aid and Migration Service mobilized thousands of people to provide food, clothing, and medical care to Syrian refugees in 2015; the Partizán Youtube channel hosted interviews and debates). Others undertook crowdsourcing campaigns (such as via Adjukossze.hu); started social cooperatives or webshops to support financial sustainability; utilized volunteers (e.g., leveraging compulsory community service for high school students and public works programs); obtained personal income tax assignments (e.g., the Magyar Civilszervezetek campaign); improved coalition building (e.g., Civilization—a coalition defending civic space—grew in membership); improved fundraising and organizational development (e.g., the Self-Governing Body of Fundraising Organizations expanded its membership and community foundations launched in some towns); and improved their public image (e.g., the Civil Society Award for CSO best practices initiated by NIOK and the Civil Compass Foundation). However, overall, the restrictive legal environment,

political animosity, weak economy, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, still severely chipped away at the overall sustainability of CSOs.

Public apathy undermined civic engagement



Against all of the above was a backdrop of increased political apathy and a public that viewed CSOs with suspicion or as groups that provided useful but not essential services. Advocacy efforts by CSOs—even the best organized coalitions in the environment and human rights fields—had increasingly fewer wins over time. Examples include following: the Students’ Network protested at the old Fidesz headquarters in 2013 against restrictive constitutional amendments, but it did not result in any legislative changes; in 2017, a broad coalition protested against the “foreign agent” law but the law still passed largely unchanged; an active coalition in Budapest on behalf of the City Belongs to Everyone movement was formed to support homeless people, but failed to prevent a clause being added to the constitution in 2018 banning homelessness; and numerous opposition candidates were elected at local levels in 2019, but the government had already curtailed the autonomy of municipalities. By 2018, 80 percent of private media was centralized and owned by figures tied to the ruling party, facilitating the manipulation of information available to the public about CSOs and their objectives and allowing for orchestrated smear campaigns. A Pew Research Center study, although published in 2016, reflected much of what Hungarian civil society encountered over the past 12 years, describing Hungary as the “lone nation where pessimism clearly outweighs optimism on this front.”

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: CIVIC SPACE CLOSED GLOBALLY

An enabling legal environment with clear and simple regulations, a predictable rule of law, available and professional legal expertise, and an ability to operate freely, is fundamental to CSO sustainability. Based on analysis of the seven dimensions of the CSO Sustainability Index across the countries covered by the Index in 2010-2022, the legal environment dimension deteriorated the most, with 56

of the 82 countries monitored ending with worse legal environment scores than when they started;⁷ Hungary and Russia showed the greatest deterioration (2.3 and 2.2-point reductions, respectively). Thirteen countries ended with the same scores,⁸ leaving only 13 countries with better values at the end from where they

Highest performing countries in legal environment in 2021/2022³	Estonia (1.9), Lithuania (2.2), Latvia (2.6), Bulgaria (2.7), Czech Republic (2.7)
Lowest performing countries in legal environment in 2021/2022	Belarus (7.0), South Sudan (7.0), Zimbabwe (6.9), Russia (6.8), Burundi (6.7)
Greatest improvement in legal environment⁴	Ethiopia, Slovenia, Armenia, Moldova ⁵
Greatest deterioration in legal environment	Hungary, Russia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines

started.⁹ Of the countries with the greatest improvement—Ethiopia and Slovenia—their final scores still fell within the lowest designation of sustainability, “sustainability impeded” (5.1 and 5.3, respectively). In fact, the vast majority of Index scores for the legal environment dimension fell within the “sustainability evolving” and “sustainability impeded” tiers in 2021 and 2022.

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014) ⁶	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	9	7
Sustainability Evolving	39	37
Sustainability Impeded	20	29

The legal environment setbacks over the past 12 years were primarily the result of three different approaches by government, with many governments employing all three: 1) enacting and implementing onerous and restrictive legislation and regulations; 2) harassing and

³ 2022 data used as endline for countries covered by the 2022 CSOSI

⁴ From 2010 or first year covered (if later than 2010) to last year covered by the CSOSI. Using a pre-2010 baseline was determined to skew results towards E&E countries, as only E&E countries were covered before 2010, some back to 1997.

⁵ The countries are ordered from most improved, and below, from most deteriorated.

⁶ The years 2014 and 2021 were selected so that each provide a global snapshot. Before 2014, Asia was not covered, and in 2022, only 15 countries were covered. A caveat is that the list of countries covered in 2014 and in 2021 were not exactly the same; the total number of countries covered in 2014 was 68, and in 2021 it was 73.

⁷ Since 2010, for E&E countries.

⁸ Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bosnia, Cameroon, Liberia, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mali, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Zambia

⁹ Armenia, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Ukraine

intimidating CSOs; and 3) utilizing global challenges such as terrorism and the COVID-19 pandemic to justify further constraints on civic space.

Restrictive legislation and regulations undermined CSOs

In the first half of the last decade, governments increasingly passed restrictive legislation and restrictively implemented regulations to limit CSOs' activities and overall civic space. Between 2012 and 2013, over 30 countries had proposed or enacted legislation that constrained civil society. One method that governments used to restrict CSO operations was the creation of new rules on acquisition and use of foreign funds. A new Law on Foreign Agents was passed in Russia in 2012 requiring CSOs that engaged in political activities, such as actions to influence public opinion and policy, and that received foreign funding, to register as "foreign agents." In Uzbekistan and Belarus, CSOs were allowed to use foreign funds only after approval from specific state ministries and agencies, allowing the government to restrict those not considered loyal. In Egypt, 2013 legislation denied foreign funding to CSOs and limited public assembly. In Nepal and Bangladesh, additional burdens emerged in 2016 related to the requirements for CSOs to register and receive case-by-case approval to accept foreign funds, with CSOs working on human rights, good governance, or other sensitive issues receiving much more scrutiny. In Poland, in 2017, the government created a new agency reporting to the prime minister that distributed all public funds—domestic and foreign—related to civil society development. Also in 2017, the Pakistani government implemented policies to regulate foreign and foreign-funded CSOs. In Georgia, a 2023 draft of a "foreign agent" law modeled from Russia, while ultimately withdrawn, signified a low point in the state of democracy and civic space there, and set the stage for even bigger declines to the legal environment for civil society.

Another method governments used to constrain CSOs was burdensome registration requirements. Lengthy, cumbersome, and sometimes costly registration processes were noted throughout the past 12 years, particularly for human rights and governance groups in all CSOSI regions, including in the countries of Albania, Angola, Gabon, Hungary, Iraq, Morocco, Nepal, and Yemen. In 2016, a year in which 14 sub-Saharan African countries reported score deterioration in the legal environment dimension, more stringent implementation of CSO registration laws was noted in Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Sudan. In 2021 in Yemen, CSOs were required to obtain work permits for every project, the approval of which was sometimes delayed or selective.

Governments used other legal provisions to assume greater control over CSO operations as well. In Uganda, the NGO Act and 2009 regulations continued to impose many bureaucratic procedures on CSOs and violate the constitutional guarantees of freedoms of expression and assembly. In 2016, Burundi, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda experienced the passage of new laws that curbed CSO activities. By that same year, constricted civic space had become the norm in countries like Azerbaijan, Hungary, Russia, and Macedonia (now North Macedonia), and the following year, five of nine countries in the Northern Tier of Eastern Europe—long-

standing EU members with overall enabling legal environments—faced increased legal restrictions.

State-sponsored harassment and intimidation of independent CSOs constrained activities

Governments also restricted civic space through state-sponsored harassment and intimidation, including utilizing laws with vague wording to provide authorities with wide discretion to interfere with CSOs perceived as controversial. Inspections and fines were common tools of harassment. The CSOSI report for 2014 noted that in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, CSOs were threatened with fines and/or imprisonment for failure to submit required reports or register properly. In Serbia, 2021 was the seventh consecutive year of legal environment deterioration, and the environment was marked by CSOs undergoing lengthy financial inspections, as well as activists dealing with charges of misdemeanors and fines.

Governments criminalized various activities of CSOs to intimidate and justify extensive repression. In Azerbaijan, an unprecedented crackdown on CSOs began in 2014, with freezing of bank accounts and investigations of CSO offices, intensified in 2015, and continued in 2016 when activists were detained and some were subject to beatings and threats of rape or violence against relatives. In Egypt, a new, restrictive NGO bill in 2016 was passed. Separately, members of human rights groups were barred from traveling out of the country and had their assets frozen as part of a criminal investigation into the registration and funding of human rights organizations. In addition, some human rights groups were arbitrarily closed. In Pakistan, a new 2017 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act was adopted with the result of stifling online dissent. In Bangladesh, a 2018 Digital Security Act criminalized certain online speech, thus weakening CSO advocacy; more than 60 people were arrested, mostly for exercising their right to freedom of expression on the Internet. In 2022 in Belarus, which already had a score of 7.0 (the worst possible score), the legal environment became even more restrictive as CSOs were subject to widespread suspension of activities, searches of offices, forced liquidation, and criminal charges.

In some countries, CSOs adapted to the new situation, while in others, the sector became polarized or incapacitated as different CSOs encountered different restrictions and benefits. For example, independent CSOs, especially those conducting advocacy work, often faced more intimidation and restrictions in funding in such places as Hungary, Russia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Iraq, as governments tried to limit anti-corruption activities or stifle opposition in advance of elections. Yet at the same time, government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) received significant support, ranging from funding to office space and equipment, as seen in Hungary, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Governments' cynical use of global threats restricted civic space

Government officials imposed additional legal and administrative constraints on CSOs with the justification of defending national security, protecting public health, and/or combatting terrorism, with notable impacts on freedom of expression and assembly. In Jordan from 2014 to 2015, the definition of “terrorist act” was expanded with sweeping language targeting online expression and with further restrictions on foreign funding to CSOs. In Yemen, registration and renewal of licenses in 2016 became subject to arbitrary decisions and ministry approval was required to enter into partnerships with international NGOs, under the justification of security-related measures. Heightened surveillance and ad hoc visits from state intelligence agencies like the Terrorism Investigation Department instilled a climate of censorship among CSOs in Sri Lanka in 2021. That same year, in the Philippines, authorities were granted sweeping powers to accuse organizations or individuals of “inciting to commit terrorism” through speeches, proclamations, writing, emblems, and banners. In Russia, which had the most dramatic decrease in the legal environment score in 2022, the government made it a crime to disseminate “fake” information about the invasion of Ukraine. As a result, within that year, nearly 21,000 people were detained for protesting and over 5,500 for committing administrative offenses.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated restrictions on civic engagement but also provided more repressive governments with an opportunity to further limit freedom of assembly and expression. In 2020 in Africa, the clampdown on civic space in the context of the pandemic was reflected in the deterioration of the legal environments for CSOs in 17 of the 32 sub-Saharan African countries included in that year’s Index.¹⁰ The tension between governments’ legitimate efforts to control the pandemic and their use of the pandemic to stifle the exercise of civic freedoms were at the forefront of elections in 2020. In 2021, several countries in Asia reimposed restrictions on businesses, travel, and gatherings to prevent further outbreaks but these were also used to justify wider crackdowns on public gatherings (e.g., in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, and Thailand). Many governments also increasingly clamped down on individuals who criticized the government’s response to the pandemic and utilized the need to monitor the spread of the virus as a way to increase surveillance on human rights CSOs.

To further explore this and other trends in CSO sustainability, please visit the CSOSI’s dashboard at csosi.org, where you can find all CSOSI reports and visualization of the historical data.

¹⁰ Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: CSOS ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICALLY

From 2010 to 2022, the number of countries with overall improved organizational capacity scores (38) was near equal to the number with worse scores (36);¹¹ however, notably broad progress was recorded related to CSOs' access to and use of technology. These improvements not only helped groups to build their constituencies, but also positively impacted elements of other CSOSI dimensions, helping them advance advocacy campaigns, fundraise, and adapt their services to challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Highest performing countries in organizational capacity in 2021/2022	Estonia (2.5), Lithuania (2.5), Czech Republic (2.6), Latvia (2.9), Poland (3.0), Slovenia (3.0), Timor-Leste (3.0)
Lowest performing countries in organizational capacity in 2021/2022	Azerbaijan (6.1), Burundi (6.0), Sudan (5.7), Guinea (5.6), Jordan (5.6), Libya (5.6)
Greatest improvement in organizational capacity	The Gambia, Slovenia, Iraq, Madagascar, Moldova, Sri Lanka
Greatest deterioration in organizational capacity	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Hungary, Namibia, Sudan, Thailand

Early in the last decade, the online revolution started to permeate CSO sectors

In 2012, the online revolution was accelerating in multiple regions.

Romanian CSOs increasingly used social media to mobilize citizens for protests, complete petitions, and fundraise, while Moldovan CSOs actively used social media tools and web-based platforms to recruit staff and volunteers. Activists and CSOs in countries such as Egypt and Angola utilized the Internet and social media to bypass state-controlled media and improve their outreach, benefiting their overall public image. In Yemen, where the media landscape was highly partisan, social media allowed CSOs to reach larger and more diverse audiences than traditional media, for free. One group (SOUL) increased its number of Facebook fans from 400 to more than 6,000 over a six-month period. In Gabon, CSOs took advantage of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to disseminate information and advance advocacy campaigns against ritual crimes and supporting land rights. Mobile phone texting became an innovative way to initiate fundraising campaigns in such countries as the Czech Republic, in which CSOs raised approximately \$1,360,000 through donor text messages in 2012 alone. In addition, online fundraising platforms, including crowdfunding sites, were developing throughout Europe/Eurasia and pockets of Africa. For example, Kenyan NGOs utilized mobile

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	6	7
Sustainability Evolving	45	45
Sustainability Impeded	17	21

¹¹ Eight countries ended with the same organizational capacity score as they started.

technology like M-Pesa, a mobile-phone based money transfer and microfinance service, to raise funds.

In the middle of the last decade, CSOs further integrated technology into their services, advocacy, and fundraising

By 2016, the Internet became more widespread and affordable and the use of smartphones increased, with more CSOs utilizing the technologies. Gambian CSOs improved their public image through social media accounts and the production of short audio and video materials about their work. Likewise, in Thailand, platforms such as Facebook and Line made it easier for CSOs to generate their own content and coverage, with journalists often identifying news story leads from CSOs' own social media posts. In Cambodia, CSOs were beginning to develop social media guidelines, digital applications, and information and communications technology manuals to enhance CSOs' technological skills. CSOs used technology to enhance services: in Tanzania, CSOs shared up-to-date information with beneficiaries about the availability of medications and market prices for farm products via the Internet; in Sri Lanka, groups disseminated research findings via social media to enhance public discussions on policy alternatives; and in Yemen, CSOs conducted community needs assessments via smartphones. CSOs also used technology to circumvent more restrictive environments, as in Sudan, where a growing number of groups communicated through social media to avoid government intrusion and to wage campaigns to prevent increases in the price of medicine, stop demolition of squatter settlements, and other important issues.

At the same time, in 2016 CSOs started to report success at using crowdfunding sites for political and human rights activities, including in restrictive environments. The Human Rights Center in Estonia raised funds through crowdsourcing to hire lawyers to file cases in court to protect the rights of same-sex couples while the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland collected funds to issue a guidebook on whistleblower protections. Armenian CSOs, especially informal groups, used online platforms such as GoFundMe, Indiegogo, Kickstarter, and ONEArmenia to raise funds; one group of CSOs collected over \$150,000 in three months to provide first aid to soldiers and civilians wounded during military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. In Belarus, CSOs doubled in 2016 what they raised in 2015 on crowdfunding platforms such as Talaka, Ulej, and MaeSens. In those situations where funding was particularly restricted, CSOs used social media to enhance volunteer support. In Iraq, CSOs used social media to raise awareness and increase volunteer support for advocacy campaigns to improve a draft law on domestic violence.

Near the end of the last decade, social media use and crowdfunding had become common, particularly among more established CSOs in Europe/Eurasia and Africa. In the Czech Republic, CSOs increasingly used digital approaches to raise funds, such as crowdfunding and GIVT, a platform for donating while shopping online. According to the Czech Donors Forum, in 2018, the number of donations made by text message increased 17 percent over 2017. In Belarus in

2019, 218 new projects were launched on Ulej.by, the biggest crowdfunding platform; 98 of them successfully raised the target amount of money. In Albania, after a devastating 2019 earthquake, CSOs collected donations from individuals, domestic groups, and the international community through the state portal e-Albania and other crowdfunding platforms. In 2019, a few Nigerian CSOs used crowdfunding to raise funds, with one CSO mobilizing resources to renovate classrooms and Zimbabweans living in the diaspora helped to rebuild schools and houses by donating to a GoFundMe campaign.

COVID-19 pandemic necessitated technological adaptations

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, CSOs were required to reorient the focus of their programs, change their strategic planning, and alter relationships with beneficiaries, as in-person events were restricted. Despite these challenges, many CSOs successfully adapted and actually improved their organizational capacity. The pandemic forced CSOs to reconsider their goals and priorities, with a survey conducted by Causas Ciudadanas, a group of Mexican CSOs, finding that 40 percent of organizations in that country decided to reorient their programs and 24 percent created entirely new programming in order to best serve their constituencies in 2020. As more than half of CSOs faced a decrease in operating income or number of donors, many reoriented to assistance activities that required them to build new relationships with program participants and strengthen their monitoring and evaluation capacity, which some did through programs offered by national foundations. In Europe, CSOs showed their resilience and value by reacting fast to the pandemic, distributing food and personal protective equipment to vulnerable communities, organizing awareness-raising campaigns, and offering educational programs for children. According to a 2021 mapping study in Georgia, nearly half of surveyed CSOs conducted emergency response programming.

Groups with access to the Internet found that their internal and external communications strengthened during the pandemic as a result of their shift online. In Africa, larger, well-funded CSOs upgraded their equipment and provided computers and training to staff so they could work remotely and use Internet-based conferencing platforms. In Guinea, large, urban CSOs not only conducted conferences and webinars over the Internet but also learned to gather and process data using digital tools. Smaller CSOs in countries such as Burundi and Liberia formed email groups and communicated via social media, often relying on shared computers and personal cell phones. In Europe/Eurasia, 11 countries reported improvements in the organizational capacity dimension in 2020, including approximately half of the countries in each sub-region (Northern Tier, Southern Tier, Eurasia), largely due to enhanced use of technology.

In Asia, those CSOs best able to utilize online tools saw the greatest improvements in their organizational capacity scores in 2021. In Indonesia, the relatively low cost of online communication enabled CSOs like Bhakti Foundation to reach more constituents at lower cost than they could when traveling to constituent locations. Networks like AMAN Indonesia also used online communication to better understand constituent needs and project impact through

improved monitoring and evaluation. CSOs in Timor-Leste who communicated over the phone and through messenger platforms like WhatsApp were able to maintain strong relationships with their constituents.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the physical constraints that CSOs faced in conducting activities during the pandemic led many to embrace new technologies, including video conferencing tools. In Egypt, the only country in the region reporting an improvement in sectoral infrastructure in 2020, CSOs developed online training courses and resource centers to support the development of other CSOs during the pandemic. In Libya, efforts by the government to improve broadband access enabled CSOs to adapt swiftly to remote working conditions and use social media and communication platforms to reach their beneficiaries and constituencies. CSOs in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia also had greater access to online training opportunities through video conferencing technologies during the pandemic. The 2020 Mexico report noted that while the organizational capacity of the CSO sector deteriorated as a result of the loss of federal funding and other effects of the pandemic, these challenges were offset by the sector's resilience and enthusiastic adoption of technology.

It is important to note that while technological advancements were significant over the period covered by this analysis, as of 2022, reports often still mentioned a technical advancement gap between stronger and struggling organizations. Larger, more well-established NGOs, which operated in and/or close to cities with better access to the Internet and sufficient staff to support information and communications technology were able to adapt to more virtual ways of working and adopt innovations. Smaller organizations, which often operated in more rural settings where the Internet was less reliable, often had fewer financial resources to afford the cost of data or to improve their capacity to use online services. However, the CSO Sustainability Index reports showed that wherever and whenever Internet use is cheaply accessible, CSOs will take advantage to bolster their reach and sustainability.

To further explore this and other trends in CSO sustainability, please visit the CSOSI's dashboard at csosi.org, where you can find all CSOSI reports and visualization of the historical data.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: DONOR DEPENDENCE DISTORTED CSO SECTORS

A CSO’s financial viability depends on its diversification of funding sources, fundraising ability, revenue generation, and effective financial management systems. For the majority of countries tracked by the Index, CSOs depended on international donors for funding, as the countries in which they operated faced high levels of poverty, large debt burdens, a lack of domestic philanthropy, and limited income generating opportunities. Some CSOs did receive government contracts to provide services, particularly in Northern Tier European countries and Eurasia, but in the other areas covered by the Index, CSOs were often confined to targeting their services to areas where governments weren’t engaged, such as poverty relief in marginalized regions, homelessness, and disability support, and/or where donors prioritized.

Highest performing countries in financial viability in 2021/2022	Estonia (2.4), Czech Republic (3.0), Latvia (3.0), Lithuania (3.0), Poland (3.3)
Lowest performing countries in financial viability in 2021/2022	Belarus (6.7), Malawi (6.6), South Sudan (6.6), Burkina Faso (6.4), Burundi (6.4), Sudan (6.4)
Greatest improvement in financial viability	Moldova, Kosovo, Serbia, The Gambia
Greatest deterioration in financial viability	Hungary, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Malawi, South Sudan

Financial viability was the lowest scoring of the seven dimensions in all regions, with the annual average score globally remaining at or near the threshold of “sustainability impeded” (5.1) from 2010 through 2022. A solid majority of countries (49) ended with worse financial viability scores than when they were first covered by the Index,¹² while improvements were reported in only 20 countries (13 received the same score). Europe’s Northern Tier and Central Asia were a slight anomaly to the trend; in those regions, public sources of funding dominated, and in the Northern Tier in particular, CSOs diversified their funding sources through crowdfunding and other innovative approaches.

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	2	4
Sustainability Evolving	34	30
Sustainability Impeded	32	39

In addition to affecting financial viability scores, the trend of donor dependence also affected other CSOSI dimensions, through its effects on CSOs’ strategic planning and constituency building, and CSOs’ staff development and retention.

¹² Since 2010, for E&E countries.

Donor dependence constrained CSO financial sustainability

A dependence on donor funding made CSOs particularly susceptible to donor preferences, funding mechanisms, and fluctuations in funding levels. In sub-Saharan Africa between 2014 and 2016, regional reports highlighted that deterioration in financial viability scores occurred due to major donors withdrawing direct support to CSOs in favor of working through government institutions, supporting groups of CSOs versus individual ones, or using funding baskets that were difficult for smaller CSOs to access. Reports from 2019 noted a growing complaint that local CSOs blamed their precarious financial situation in part on donors' preference for funding large international organizations with the capacity to meet complex proposal requirements and handle millions of dollars in funding. An example of competition between international and domestic CSOs was evident in 2021 when Botswana and Malawi reported that international organizations were registering as local organizations to attract funds earmarked for such groups.

These challenges significantly contributed to 25 of the 32 covered countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region starting and ending in the "sustainability impeded" tier in the 2010-2022 period. Some governments sought to control the flow of donor money to the sector in order to limit CSO activities, reflecting CSOs' vulnerability in depending on donor resources to operate. For example, Russian CSOs suffered financial decline after the Law on Undesirable Organizations forced several major donors to leave the country or shut down their operations in 2015. In 2017, Egypt and Jordan both implemented administrative barriers to foreign funding of CSOs, thereby curtailing CSOs' activities. The impact of donor dependence on CSOs' financial viability was particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 in sub-Saharan Africa, a survey of 1,014 CSOs in 44 countries showed that 56 percent of CSOs surveyed had already lost funding a few months into the pandemic, as donors shifted funding primarily to governments or groups specifically responding to the pandemic.¹³ In the Middle East and North Africa, decreased availability of foreign funding accounted for most of the declines in financial viability in 2020 for Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen, with that region's eight countries recording a combined deterioration of 0.6 in the financial viability dimension. In Asia, all eight countries highlighted the loss or redirection of foreign funds as a leading concern for financial viability in 2020.¹⁴

Donor priorities distorted CSO strategic planning and constituency building

Domestic CSOs' efforts to respond to donor priorities often deprived them of the opportunity to develop their own competencies in key areas. In Africa at the start of the last decade, CSOs struggled to build constituencies, often due to a lack of resources. This led groups in such countries as Botswana, Kenya, Liberia, and Tanzania to target specific constituents in order to

¹³ Survey conducted by @AfricanNGOs and EPIC-Africa

¹⁴ Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste

access donor funds. Strategic planning by NGOs across sub-Saharan Africa remained a largely academic exercise, if it was done at all, as missions and plans changed frequently according to the availability of donor funding. This remained an issue through subsequent years. For example, in Liberia, the so-called ‘Ebola effect’ limited funding for CSOs not engaged in activities related to the epidemic, while in Mali, a new wave of donor funding for projects to counter violent extremism in 2019 caused many CSOs to move away from their traditional areas of social service provision and advocacy.

In the Middle East and North Africa early in the last decade, CSOs lacked strong strategic plans. When they did have them, the plans often seemed created primarily to meet donor requirements and were rarely implemented. Most CSOs were oriented toward short-term goals and defined their missions broadly to improve eligibility for diverse sources of funding. In 2013 and 2014, during the first years of the civil war in Syria, significant foreign aid poured into the Middle East region to support the burgeoning refugee populations. CSOs in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, while providing much needed services to Syrian refugees, ended up adjusting their programs to be eligible for funds.

In Asia, country reports highlighted that dependence on foreign donors often led CSOs to be more accountable to donors than to local citizens or to take up project activities based on the availability of funding rather than commitment to a mission. In Bangladesh, a significant amount of donor funding moved to international CSOs and UN agencies to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya refugees in 2017, while local CSOs were mostly prohibited from providing such support.

The CSOSI E&E report for 2012 highlighted that in the Southern Tier of Europe, CSOs regularly changed their mandates or left them intentionally broad so they could apply for a variety of funding opportunities rather than prioritize constituency needs. In Mexico, country reports noted that more professional and well-established organizations frequently paid closer attention to data and funders when designing their programs.

In addition to these core competencies gaps and issues of strategic direction, the donor dependence was also noted as hampering CSOs’ core operational viability, as donor funding often covers direct projects and not indirect general and administrative costs sufficient to fully cover organizations’ overhead expenses. Lack of core and long-term support for organizational development were both mentioned to be issues in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the 2016 regional report, though improvement was noted in 2017 and 2019.

Donors’ funding cycles and own staffing needs limited CSO staff development

Donor funding also impacted CSOs’ ability to hire and retain staff. The CSOSI sub-Saharan Africa report for 2016 emphasized that largely due to project-based funding, many NGOs were unable to pay competitive salaries, retain long-term staff, or cover core costs. NGOs suffered from high

turnover and often lost staff to jobs with international NGOs that were able to offer more stability and better benefits. CSOs in Niger and Mali reported losing highly qualified staff to international CSOs in 2016. In Asia, CSOSI reports noted that CSOs often had difficulty retaining professional staff because many were hired as project staff, or they were unable to offer salaries that were competitive with those of international CSOs. For example, this was noted in Sri Lanka in 2015, where CSOs were described as frequently losing staff to international CSOs that were scaling up their operations due to the political developments in the country. In the Middle East and North Africa, CSOSI reports from multiple years for countries such as Iraq, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza, and Yemen noted that most CSOs relied on volunteers to operate, which impacted the consistency and capacity of human resources. The few organizations that had permanent staff members had difficulty retaining them because their funding was not secure and CSOs could not offer competitive salaries. These examples illustrate the ways in which donor dependence affects not just funding but organizational capacities and organizational cultures as well. While this trend was noted globally as persisting through the 2010-2022 period, the organizational capacity story above provides a few examples of how CSOs have been able to utilize technology to overcome this trend and mobilize domestic resources.

To further explore this and other trends in CSO sustainability, please visit the CSOSI's dashboard at csosi.org, where you can find all CSOSI reports and visualization of the historical data.

ADVOCACY: WHEN SPACE FOR INPUT WANED, CSOs HIT THE STREETS

Deteriorations in the legal environment for CSOs often track closely with deteriorations in CSO advocacy, as restrictive legislation, arbitrary implementation of policies, and oppressive rules can create a culture of harassment, censorship, and self-censorship, weakening organizations' efforts to influence public opinion and policy. However, the CSOSI scores provide a different story. Despite the trend of shrinking civic space and worsening legal environments between 2010 and 2022, the majority of countries covered by the Index in this period (48 of 82) saw their advocacy dimension

Highest performing countries in advocacy in 2021/2022	Czech Republic (1.8), Estonia (1.7), Latvia (1.8), Lithuania (1.7), Ukraine (2.2)
Lowest performing countries in advocacy in 2021/2022	Belarus (6.1), Azerbaijan (5.5), Egypt (5.5), Thailand (5.3), Cambodia (5.2), Yemen (5.2)
Greatest improvement in advocacy	The Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia
Greatest deterioration in advocacy	Poland, Hungary, Russia, Philippines, Burundi, Azerbaijan

score improve, with 48 countries increasing their advocacy scores.¹⁵ When governments were democratic and supportive of civil society, groups undertook collaborative advocacy to shape public policies and hold governments accountable. Yet when governments became confrontational and restrictive towards advocacy-oriented groups, civil society often still remained outspoken, attempting to limit further democratic backsliding.

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	10	13
Sustainability Evolving	49	51
Sustainability Impeded	9	9

CSOs advocated for their rights despite risks

In sub-Saharan Africa, various CSOs succeeded in their advocacy efforts despite legal impediments and/or government hostility. In Zambia, while the government was stifling CSO activities under the Public Order Act through intimidation and restrictions on gatherings between 2015 and 2016, the advocacy score improved as groups developed coalitions and lobbied policy makers on several initiatives related to gender equity and equality and women's political participation. Ethiopian human rights and democracy CSOs, despite being subject to broad language in the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation that allowed the government to dissolve them for organizing on anything determined to be "purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or security," carried out advocacy activities in 2015 related to access to justice and investigated alleged human rights violations in parts of the country. Kenyan CSOs were

¹⁵ Twenty-two countries finished with a worse score and 12 ended with the same score.

subject to more rigorous vetting and reporting requirements in 2016. However, groups remained active and filed contempt of court proceedings against the government to force enactment of the 2013 Public Benefits Organization Act—a favorable legal framework for NGOs—which the High Court ordered the government to implement in 2017. In South Sudan, despite significant deterioration in the legal environment, organizational capacity, and funding opportunities in 2016, CSOs worked effectively on advocating for an arms embargo on the country, the disarming of civilians, and other advocacy efforts.

The resilience of CSOs despite government repression and instability was seen in the Middle East and North Africa as well. In Egypt, in an environment in which activists were being harassed, imprisoned, and prosecuted, the government issued Law 70 of 2017 on Associations and Other Foundations Working in the Field of Civil Work (Law 70), which increased state control over civil society, particularly groups addressing human and political rights. More than 60 CSOs advocated heavily against that law through press releases and statements, and then, after President El-Sisi signed it into law, called for its repeal. Although their efforts were unsuccessful, they were noteworthy given the risks to those groups. In Yemen, even with a civil war, intense politicization by competing government factions, and an arbitrary and restrictive legal environment, a number of CSOs implemented campaigns related to weapons-carrying, stopping armed clashes, and pressuring warring parties to end the blockade of critical roads.

In Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, in the face of increasing accusations in 2013 by various governments of CSOs being “foreign agents,” with corresponding draft and ratified legislation to restrict CSO activities, citizens in several countries took to the streets to protest government actions. In many cases, protesters demanded greater government transparency and accountability, while in other cases protests were focused on specific government decisions and policies. The most widely covered protest in the region during that time was in Ukraine, where tens of thousands of people gathered in what became known as the Revolution of Dignity to object to the president’s refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union, which ultimately culminated in a change of government and the signing of the agreement. In 2016, in Poland, the Committee for the Defense of Democracy organized mass demonstrations to protest the right-wing government’s policies and to defend democracy. Tens of thousands of people boycotted work and classes to object to a proposed anti-abortion rights law; shortly after, Poland’s parliament voted overwhelmingly to reject the bill. In Latvia in the same year, feminist movements strongly opposed proposed changes to a Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health; after the protests, the provision was removed from the law. Beyond the street protests, another avenue for advocacy was found in laws or codes that were in place in 2013 in such countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia (now North Macedonia), and Moldova requiring consultation with the public in policy making, thus providing avenues for CSOs to shape public policy.

In Asia, despite the difficult environment for advocacy, CSOs still engaged on sensitive topics such as good governance and human rights. In Cambodia in the middle of the last decade,

government harassment of human rights and advocacy activists increased and the regulations for CSOs tightened. However, civil society still organized many campaigns to free human rights defenders, demand justice for extrajudicial killings, and protect the space for civil society using social media and mobilizing youth groups. In the Philippines in 2019, as the government's hostility increased towards groups critical of its human rights record and actions towards the illegal drug trade, CSOs formed coalitions against reinstatement of the death penalty and advocated against violence and hate. The CSOs' main advocacy strategies included street protests and online campaigns.

CSOs fought for civic space during COVID-19 restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic had a debilitating effect on the exercise of civic freedoms in sub-Saharan Africa, yet advocacy improved in 17 countries in 2020. The tension between governments' legitimate efforts to control the pandemic and their use of the pandemic to stifle the exercise of civic freedoms was at the forefront during elections, which took place or were in preparation in a number of countries in 2020. CSOs in many countries advocated vigorously on pandemic-related topics, especially the need for inclusivity and accountability regarding the use of funds. CSO advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa significantly advanced in 2021 as three times as many countries reported improvement (21) as deterioration (7). In Gabon, people took to banging pots and pans in the evening to protest pandemic restrictions and later took part in a nationwide 24-hour strike. At times violent protests in South Africa were triggered in part by ongoing pandemic restrictions and related losses of income. That said, many governments demonstrated greater willingness to take CSOs seriously as partners and interlocutors, also contributing to the high rate of improvement in advocacy.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 served as the impetus for many governments in the Middle East and North Africa to significantly curtail civil liberties, including the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law's COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker noted that in 2020, the governments of the eight covered countries in the region¹⁶ adopted 32 new measures aimed at combating the virus that had a negative impact on civil liberties. Yet civil society took to the streets in protest. Enforcement of the restrictions on protests led to clashes between security forces and demonstrators in all eight of the countries. In a further indication of CSO resilience, the 2021 CSOSI for the Middle East and North Africa noted that although CSOs faced increasing restrictions on civic space and, in some cases, rising levels of disinformation and smear campaigns from government authorities, CSOs managed to maintain and even improve their organizational capacity and service provision to meet the growing needs of their communities.

In Europe/Eurasia, in 2020 and 2021, elections took place in 19 countries, but despite restrictions on public gatherings, travel, and non-essential business, CSOs engaged in voter

¹⁶ Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen

education, election monitoring, and lobbying candidates on their priority issues. GONG, a Croatian CSO, advocated actively for election reforms, calling on the government to introduce polling stations in all hospitals and retirement homes and analyzing party spending and voter irregularities, while the Initiative for a Strong Civil Society—comprised of 400 CSOs—advocated for state support to CSOs during the pandemic. In Slovakia, the platform Voice of CSOs was established before parliamentary elections to defend the civil sector and evaluate political parties' election programs, among other advocacy efforts. In Belarus, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest the elections there that took place on August 9, 2020, with authorities detaining over 33,000 protesters.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Asia also resulted in restrictions in civic space and an organized response from civil society. Just in the Middle East, ICNL's COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker in 2020 found that the governments of the eight countries surveyed that year¹⁷ adopted a total of 32 new measures affecting expression, assembly, or privacy. Also, as in the Middle East, CSOs in Indonesia, Nepal, and Thailand took to the streets to protest alleged mismanagement of COVID-19 relief funds and restrictive legislation and policies. Protesters in all three countries were met with police violence and arrests. The experience of CSOs stepping up to advocate for citizens' interests during the pandemic period reinforces the trend that CSO advocacy can be quite resilient.

To further explore this and other trends in CSO sustainability, please visit the CSOSI's dashboard at csosi.org, where you can find all CSOSI reports and visualization of the historical data.

¹⁷ Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste

SERVICE PROVISION: WHEN CRISES STRUCK, CSOs DELIVERED

“Service provision,” in the context of the CSOSI, measures the ability of the CSO sector to provide a variety of goods and services to their communities based on local needs, as well as their capacity to generate revenue through their services and receive government recognition and support. Over the past 12 years, 41 of the 82 countries analyzed ended with better service provision scores than when they started,¹⁸ while 25 ended with worse scores (16 ended with the same scores).

The service provision dimension was mostly stable in Asia in the 2010 to 2022 period, while the Northern Tier sub-region of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia showed more significant

improvement. The Southern Tier sub-region had mixed trends, while Central Asia, covered by the Index only until 2014, showed minimal change. The Middle East and North Africa region improved moderately overall and sub-Saharan Africa improved slightly. In the CSOSI reports, the relative stability of the service provision dimension and slight to moderate improvements from 2010 to 2022 was in large part attributed to CSOs’ adaptability and resilience in responding to crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Highest performing countries in Service Provision in 2021/2022	Czech Republic (2.3), Estonia (2.3), Latvia (2.4), Poland (2.4), Slovakia (2.7)
Lowest performing countries in Service Provision in 2021/2022	Belarus (5.5), Azerbaijan (5.3), Sudan (5.2), Angola (5.1), Libya (5.1)
Greatest improvement in service provision	The Gambia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Lithuania, Iraq, Moldova, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Yemen
Greatest deterioration in service provision	Turkmenistan, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Mexico

CSOs addressed critical local needs

In all regions, CSOs provided essential services, either filling gaps in government services or taking the place of them in the government’s absence, in such sectors as education, health, water and sanitation, environmental protection, microcredit, agriculture, and encouraging community mobilization and civic participation in governance. Many service-oriented CSOs demonstrated their particularly valuable role in society by providing critical services during conflicts and humanitarian disasters. In Macedonia (now North Macedonia), CSOs were present at border crossings on a daily basis in 2015 to offer food, healthcare, basic supplies, and other goods and services to refugees. CSOs in both Armenia and Azerbaijan provided needed services in the aftermath of the 2020 war over Nagorno-Karabakh, including

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	6	6
Sustainability Evolving	56	62
Sustainability Impeded	6	5

¹⁸ Since 2010, for E&E countries.

humanitarian, psychological, and legal assistance to displaced people; those who lost their homes; and families of captured, killed, wounded, or missing soldiers and civilians. Lebanese CSOs provided more diverse services as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, in addition to responding to perceived shortfalls in state-provided services, such as health care and education. More recently, Lebanese CSOs actively assisted communities after the Beirut port explosion in 2020, cleaning debris, providing food, and delivering psychosocial assistance. In 2014-2015, Yemeni CSOs increasingly provided basic goods and services to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis, for instance taking the lead in providing potable water to residents in Taiz and emergency medical relief in Aden.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, CSOs have responded ably to the large influx of refugees in neighboring countries. In Poland, CSOs quickly took the lead in providing aid to refugees in coordination with businesses and local governments. CSOs were also among the first to respond to the refugees flooding into Moldova; according to a report by the Alliance of Active NGOs in the Field of Children and Family Social Protection (APSCF), 100 CSOs provided support to approximately 240,000 refugees within the first three months of the influx. In Georgia, CSO services to refugees included psycho-social assistance, cash assistance, humanitarian aid, healthcare services, and access to education.

CSOs responded adeptly to the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created particular challenges for service-oriented CSOs in light of travel restrictions and shifting community needs. In sub-Saharan Africa, CSOs demonstrated their adaptability by adjusting their activities early in the pandemic to distribute food and protective supplies or raise public awareness about the disease, often in cooperation with governments. For example, Liberian CSOs partnered with the Ministry of Health to erect billboards providing information about the disease, while Nigerian organizations distributed handwashing kits, masks, and other equipment in cooperation with government programs. A Ghanaian organization, Youth Bridge Foundation, reengineered a STEM curriculum into a radio program so that students could continue to learn from home, while a Senegalese CSO, Alphadev, helped out-of-school youth make masks and distribute them free of charge in communes, markets, fishing piers, and bus stations.

In Asia, dwindling resources, travel restrictions, and limitations on in-person gatherings constrained CSOs' ability to provide traditional services or emergency relief, as many CSOs struggled to reach impoverished or rural communities, migrant workers, or small-scale farmers who lacked the infrastructure and resources to join the shift to online work. Yet CSOs across the region recognized the new needs and responded as ably as possible, often taking up entirely new focus areas such as health education and food distribution, the provision of personal protective equipment, or direct cash assistance. In Nepal, CSOs collaborated with the Ministry of Health to produce public information campaigns and develop online resource platforms. In Sri Lanka, organizations that had previously focused on conflict resolution and peacebuilding

realigned their services to respond to pandemic-related needs. In Indonesia, CSOs recorded an improvement in service provision, as groups worked to find a balance between traditional service provision and emergency relief. The Indonesian Red Cross mobilized 23,000 volunteers in response to the pandemic, 80 percent of whom were non-medical personnel. CSO volunteers supported by the Indika Foundation built the website KAWAL COVID-19 (Monitor COVID-19), which pooled government and independent resources to provide data and information about COVID-19. Furthermore, groups which traditionally addressed gender-based violence reported on increased cases of violence during the pandemic and continued to provide support to victims through legal, health, and psychological rehabilitation.

In Europe/Eurasia, CSOs showed their resilience and proved their value by providing critical pandemic-response services to their constituents, often reacting faster than the government. In Georgia, nearly half of the surveyed CSOs conducted emergency response and public health programming in response to the pandemic. In North Macedonia, the food bank Banka Za Hrana organized the massive #WeStandTogether initiative in August 2021 with twenty charities and over 200 volunteers to deliver, in just 11 days, 1,620 food packages, 6,480 protective masks, and 1,620 hand sanitizers to families across 20 municipalities in the country. In the Czech Republic, CSOs were able to administer vaccinations much faster than the public authorities could. In Croatia, CSOs responded to the needs of the victims of a deadly earthquake in December 2020, collecting clothes, hygienic items, and food while also providing homeless individuals with hand sanitizer, masks, and other means of protection from the pandemic.

In the Middle East and North Africa, CSOs faced a number of challenges when providing services, including a lack of financial resources as well as pandemic-related restrictions on movement and on the types of activities that could be safely implemented. Despite this, groups across the region not only provided critical services—distributing humanitarian aid, food, and personal protective equipment and raising awareness of the pandemic—but also expanded their service delivery beyond the pandemic, driving an improvement in the service provision dimension in six of the eight countries surveyed in 2020.¹⁹ In Lebanon, as mentioned above, CSOs reacted quickly after the Beirut port explosion. In Libya, CSOs provided humanitarian relief to victims of the ongoing conflict. In Yemen, some CSOs even introduced new services during the pandemic; for example, the Sheba Youth Foundation set up the first-ever business incubator in Taiz and Resonate! Yemen enhanced the capacity of local authorities in Hadhramaut, Aden, and Taiz by helping them to prepare strategic plans that reflected community priorities. Given the incredibly difficult environments that many of these organizations worked in, maintaining and even expanding operations was a remarkable accomplishment, speaking to the monumental efforts of CSOs.

To further explore this and other trends in CSO sustainability, please visit the CSOSI's dashboard at csosi.org, where you can find all CSOSI reports and visualization of the historical data.

¹⁹ Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: CSO SUPPORT SERVICES MOVED ONLINE

The sectoral infrastructure dimension of the CSOSI measures a fundamental component of CSO sustainability, including a sector’s CSO networks, platforms, and opportunities for coordinating and training to improve CSOs’ skills. It encompasses intermediary support organizations (ISOs) and resource centers, local grantmaking organizations, cooperation among CSOs, available training opportunities, and collaboration between CSOs and other sectors. The CSOSI recorded that sectoral infrastructure was very slow to develop over the past 12 years. Nevertheless, 53 of the 82 countries covered by the CSOSI in the period 2010 to 2022 ended with better sectoral infrastructure scores than when they were first covered,²⁰ compared to 21 countries ending with an overall deterioration in the score (and eight with the same score).

At the start of the last decade, in many regions (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Central Asia) there were few ISOs and resource centers, minimal local grant-makers, a dearth of training outside of cities and in local languages, and limited intersectoral partnerships. In Asia, CSOs had more access to resource centers and some training opportunities;

intersectoral partnerships, while nascent, were growing. Northern Tier European CSOs and Eurasian CSOs generally had stronger infrastructure, including resource centers supported by national governments or the European Union, and cooperation with each other and other sectors, while CSOs in the Southern Tier of Europe were somewhat weaker but EU-supported programs fostered formation of intersectoral coalitions.

Through the last decade, sectoral infrastructure saw improvements due to online technology, especially in Europe/Eurasia, but starting in 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, other regions made progress in catching up with their use of online infrastructure to bolster the sector’s sustainability.

Highest performing countries in sectoral infrastructure in 2021/2022	Estonia (1.6), Poland (2.2), Latvia (2.3), Czech Republic (2.7), Bulgaria (2.8), Croatia (2.8), Lithuania (2.8)
Lowest performing countries in sectoral infrastructure in 2021/2022	Azerbaijan (5.8), Burundi (5.8), Libya (5.7), Angola (5.6), South Sudan (5.6)
Greatest improvement in sectoral infrastructure	Moldova, The Gambia, Madagascar, Armenia, Mali, Nigeria
Greatest deterioration in sectoral infrastructure	Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	9	12
Sustainability Evolving	44	42
Sustainability Impeded	15	19

²⁰ With E&E region scores beginning at 2010.

Online services gave boost to sector

Growth in sectoral infrastructure finally took off in the middle of the last decade, particularly in the countries of Europe/Eurasia. A key impetus was the incorporation of more online ways of working, especially in providing and receiving capacity building support. In 2016 in Armenia, capacity building for CSOs expanded, including the Eurasia Partnership Foundation's launch of a website in which CSOs could find information on other organizations, donors, grant opportunities, and trainers on various topics. In addition, a USAID-funded CSO Development Program trained 60 CSOs around the country in fundraising, with the program's CSO Portal providing information, training, and research material (as of 2017, the portal had nearly 3,000 active monthly users). In Moldova, local grant making increased in 2016, as the National Youth Council of Moldova, an umbrella organization of 58 youth CSOs, sub-granted government funding for the institutional development of local CSOs. These efforts were supported by the ability of CSOs to find information about grant programs easily online on www.civic.md and www.finantari.md.

In 2017, more than one-third of the countries included in the CSOSI's regional report for the Europe/Eurasia region that year recorded improvements in the infrastructure supporting the sector. A variety of innovative tools were being developed at that time to support CSOs' operations. In Armenia, CSOs had increased access to draft laws developed by state agencies through the online and interactive platform e-draft.am, which improved the sector's ability to undertake advocacy initiatives. In addition, training and technical assistance opportunities were abundant. In the framework of the STRONG CSOs for Stronger Armenia project, over 150 CSOs participated in 14 trainings, 293 coaching sessions, and 20 pro bono consultations on organizational management, project management, fundraising, and social entrepreneurship. The materials were even made available in Armenian and English on the project website www.civilsociety.am. In Serbia, Catalyst Balkans introduced three new and improved online organizational development tools—CiviCatalyst, the first client relations management platform in Serbia tailor-made for CSOs; Giving Balkans, a platform with data and visual reports on philanthropic actions; and Donations, a crowdfunding platform for non-profit campaigns. In Russia, online education was developing, with distance learning programs being offered by the Center for CSO Development, the online educational platform PRONKO, the Social Technology Greenhouse, and others. In Russia's regions, CSOs were increasingly able to access online broadcasts and recordings of interesting events, meetings, and conferences. Lastly, in Ukraine, CSOs had access to many training opportunities online. Prometheus, an online education platform, provided online courses on civic education, corruption-related research, program management, decentralization, and other relevant topics for CSOs.

CSOs' response to COVID-19 leveraged online services and strengthened collaboration

The COVID-19 pandemic created unique circumstances for sectoral infrastructure improvements, particularly in requiring CSOs to collaborate more with one another and with governments to address various pandemic-related needs as well as to shift to online activities. Over one-third of the 82 countries in the CSOSI showed improvements in the sectoral infrastructure score between 2019 and 2021 (33 countries). The most commonly cited reasons were greater collaboration among CSOs and increased availability of capacity building opportunities, largely through virtual support.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Nigeria report noted that in 2020, resource centers and ISOs were offering their services mostly online at no cost to participants, and in 2021, collaboration and network building among CSOs intensified as pandemic restrictions relaxed, as seen in the formation of the Conference of Northern States CSOs to facilitate collaboration among CSOs and the government. In Sudan, the pandemic spurred increased cooperation between the government and CSOs, particularly outside of Khartoum where the government relied heavily on CSOs to raise awareness about the virus and help curb its spread. For the first time, the Ministry of Labor and Social Development created a civil society partnerships officer position to oversee the development of relationships with the CSO sector.

In the Middle East and North Africa, 30 Egyptian CSOs created online resource centers in 2020 to support the development of other CSOs. For example, the Gerhart Center at the American University in Cairo provided CSOs with training to develop the technical and management capacities of CSOs, and the Al Korra Foundation for Sustainable Development offered online trainings in crisis management free of charge.

In Asia, CSOs in Timor-Leste reported enhanced training opportunities, virtually and increasingly in-person in 2021, in such areas as advocacy, organizational management, and financial policy. Groups also strengthened coalitions and networks, with intersectoral partnerships forming among CSOs, the government, the private sector, media, and religious organizations to prevent and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. One example was the private sector supplying disinfectant and masks while CSOs coordinated the distribution of the supplies.

Lastly, in Europe/Eurasia, as capacity building services moved online, they became available to a wider group of CSOs, including smaller organizations not located in the capital or larger cities. In Poland, for example, access to technology enabled more CSOs to participate in trainings, workshops, and live online meetings, while also lowering the costs of trainings and increasing access to experts from inside and outside the country. Ukrainian CSOs reported taking advantage of free online courses on the Coursera, Prometheus, and EdEra platforms on topics such as nonprofit management, human rights, and civic education.

While it remains to be seen whether more recent CSO and government partnerships as well as broader collaboration within the CSO sector will be sustainable in a post-pandemic environment, online support services seem well established, with a projected expansion as Internet connectivity further expands to smaller, more remote CSOs.

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PUBLIC IMAGE: CSOs' IMAGE SHAPED BY POLITICAL TRANSITIONS AND CRISIS RESPONSE

The public image dimension improved in the majority of countries covered by the CSOSI from 2010 to 2022, with 50 countries ending with a better CSO public image score than the first year they were covered.²¹ Public image scores worsened in 23 countries and stayed the same in nine.

Public understanding of CSOs started off as limited but improved in many places over time. In various years, repressive governments in all regions (e.g., Belarus, Burma, Egypt, Russia, Turkmenistan) had a grip on media coverage of CSOs and consistently broadcast negative messages about them. Other governments created a dichotomy in the public image of CSOs, portraying service-providing organizations as partners while trying to discredit and delegitimize advocacy- and human rights-related organizations through smear campaigns. In many countries, CSOs themselves also struggled to promote a positive public image, with weak public relations skills, limited journalism capacity, and underdeveloped relationships with the media.

Highest performing countries in public image in 2021/2022	Estonia (2.0), Lithuania (2.1), Czech Republic (2.5), Latvia (2.7), Poland (2.8)
Lowest performing countries in public image in 2021/2022	Libya (5.8), Belarus (5.7), Egypt (5.7), Azerbaijan (5.5), Russia (5.3)
Greatest improvement in public image	Ethiopia, Slovenia, The Gambia, Iraq, Ukraine
Greatest deterioration in public image	Turkmenistan, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bulgaria

SUSTAINABILITY TIER	Countries # (2014)	Countries # (2021)
Sustainability Enhanced	6	7
Sustainability Evolving	56	61
Sustainability Impeded	6	5

Public perceptions improved most during political transitions or crises

Major events, such as changes in government, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic, provided CSOs with opportunities to demonstrate their value to the public and improve their overall public image. In sub-Saharan Africa, the 2019 regional report noted that 17 countries reported improvements, often because of expanded media coverage of CSOs' analyses or leadership in moments of crisis, suggesting growing appreciation of CSOs' contributions, especially regarding advocacy. In Nepal and the Philippines, improvements in public image in 2015 and 2020 were specifically linked to CSOs providing disaster relief after an earthquake and typhoons, respectively. In Armenia, CSOs' image elevated in 2018 during a dramatic change in government, as groups mobilized significant constituencies in support of protests and pushed

²¹ With E&E countries starting from 2010.

anti-corruption and human rights agendas during the electoral process. In Montenegro, official government rhetoric towards civil society improved with the appointment of a new prime minister in December 2010, in which the government publicly identified the sector as its partner in advancing accession to the EU. In Ethiopia and The Gambia, the end of decades of autocratic rule opened civic space and allowed governance and human rights organizations to connect with constituents and demonstrate their value in shaping public policies, addressing past human rights violations, and holding governments accountable.

The reverse could be said about governments that became increasingly authoritarian—such as Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia—where increased restrictions on civic space went hand in hand with smear campaigns against CSOs defending civil rights and liberties and promoting social agendas that ran counter to that of the governing party. These campaigns caused deteriorations in the sector’s public image (and the tactics sometimes spread to other countries within their respective regions over time).

However, CSOs’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic had significant positive impact on the sector’s public image. The deteriorating public image scores caused by smear campaigns against CSOs in Europe was reversed in 2020 and 2021, with 12 of the 24 countries covered by the Index—including a majority in the Southern Tier and Eurasia—reporting improvements in the dimension. Advances in public image in all 12 countries were fueled by improved public perceptions and increased media coverage of CSOs’ efforts to address the effects of the pandemic (as well as other urgent domestic situations like the effects of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the earthquakes in Croatia, the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the political crisis in Belarus).

In the Middle East and North Africa, the active engagement of CSOs in pandemic relief efforts also contributed to a significant improvement in the public image of CSO sectors. Five countries recorded advances in the dimension²² in 2020, largely due to increased visibility in providing aid and relief services. In Morocco, CSOs received extensive media coverage in public media outlets and on influential websites about their efforts to raise public awareness of COVID-19 protocols and their provision of aid to more vulnerable members of society.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 20 countries showed gains in public image between 2019 and 2021; Rwanda and Zambia showed the greatest improvements, by 0.3 each. In Rwanda, public mistrust of CSOs decreased markedly during the pandemic, as communities increasingly appreciated CSOs’ provision of materials such as food and hygienic supplies; in addition, CSOs benefited from positive media coverage. In Zambia, as CSOs advocated for political and financial accountability and effective management of the pandemic, they were portrayed in the media as representatives of core public interests, creating a positive public view of them even when criticized by the government. In addition, CSOs that provided social services during the

²² Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia

pandemic such as health care, education, water, and interventions in cases of domestic violence enjoyed high levels of public support.

In Asia in 2020, one of the few positive dimension-level score changes in the region reported was in the public image dimension in the Philippines, which improved moderately despite declines in all other dimensions. A main reason was CSO aid during the pandemic, which enhanced visibility and support for CSOs.

Sri Lanka: A case study in fluctuations in public image

Sri Lanka serves as an interesting case study in the factors influencing public image, as the country saw one of the greatest improvements to public image between 2014 and 2015 (5.2 to 4.3) as well as one of the largest deteriorations between 2015 and 2021 (4.3 to 5.0). Throughout, the changes in public image largely reflected shifting perspectives on rights-based CSOs, as service-oriented organizations tended to benefit from generally positive public perceptions across the country.

The marked improvement in the public image for Sri Lankan CSOs was due to the increased media freedom brought by the change in government in 2015. In 2014, the state had significant control over the media and frequently intimidated journalists. Independent and state-run media propagated a predominantly negative image of CSOs as collaborating with foreign institutions seen as hostile to the government. Negative media coverage also stemmed partly from post-2004 tsunami recovery efforts during which international CSOs were accused of mismanaging funds, eroding the public image of CSOs overall. However, in 2015, presidential elections resulted in the end of nearly ten years of increasingly authoritarian and centralized rule, with a new president inaugurated who had campaigned on restoring good governance. As a result, the media enjoyed new freedoms and greater ability to cover CSO advocacy initiatives on such issues as the withdrawal of hate speech legislation and discontinuation of the military's exercise of police powers. In addition, prominent CSO activists began to take up senior positions in the press.

Despite the sharp improvement in CSOs' public image, the positive trajectory did not continue. While in 2016 and 2017 media freedoms continued and the press widely covered CSO advocacy campaigns, including those critical of government policies, some state-owned media institutions perpetuated suspicions of CSOs as "meddling in domestic affairs," and in certain regions of the country, CSOs were perceived as being "foreign-backed." In subsequent years, amid political volatility and civil unrest, government officials increasingly made negative statements about rights-based CSOs, particularly those calling to hold members of the armed forces accountable for alleged human rights abuses. In 2018, the President branded human rights organizations and activists as sympathizers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam separatist group and blamed CSOs for ongoing protests in parts of the country. In addition, the government took reactive measures to regulate social media platforms and replace the heads

of state-owned media. As violence from civil unrest increased, with a series of coordinated suicide bombings in 2019, the public image of CSOs experienced a catastrophic deterioration owing to heightened government scrutiny and an increase in negative rhetoric from key politicians during presidential elections. That year, the media increasingly portrayed CSOs as purely motivated by money and as threats to national security. The COVID-19 pandemic helped to halt the deterioration in the dimension score, as the visibility of CSOs' service delivery improved public views of the sector. However, the dimension ended at 5.0, at the cusp of the "sustainability impeded" tier.

The CSOSI no longer covered Sri Lanka for 2022, a year in which over 200,000 citizens took to the streets to demand political change in the "Aragalaya" protest movement and achieved a significant change in government. With the populist and authoritarian government now removed and with people power shown to be capable of achieving big change, the public image of the CSO sector is likely to improve, based on the CSOSI's trends in other places. At the same time, the new context is one in which the population is impatient to see the street protests translated into greater CSO policy influence and benchmark expectations for CSOs are now quite high.

While the future in Sri Lanka remains uncertain, this story provides further evidence of the trends the CSOSI found globally, that while CSOs' public image can benefit greatly or be severely hampered depending on the government and government-aligned media, they can also turn crisis into an opportunity to demonstrate their value in a way that is hard to deny.

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