

2024



BELARUSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

CONTENT:

INTRODUCTION	01
CODED METHODOLOGY	04
OVERALL ESG SUSTAINABILITY	06
LEGAL ENVIRONMENT	08
ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY	09
FINANCIAL VIABILITY	11
ADVOCACY	14
SERVICE PROVISION	16
SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE	18
PUBLIC IMAGE	20

This report was prepared within the framework of the Bank of Ideas open call for external researchers. This project is funded by the European Union.

Case studies:

Belarus Future Governance organised by the Center for New Ideas on November 21, 2024

Photo credits:

Center for New Ideas

INTRODUCTION

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is proud to present the 15th edition of the Belarusian Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index, which reflects the key trends and developments in the sector in 2024.

This edition is a testament to the strength, resilience, and solidarity of Belarusian civil society organisations, initiatives, and activists. Despite unprecedented repression, threat, and uncertainty about the future, civil-society leaders continue working for a sovereign, democratic, and prosperous Belarus.

The Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index (CSOSI) is an analytical tool developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1998 to assess the level of development of civil society organisations in various parts of the world. CSOSI sustainability has been implemented in more than 70 countries across Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Since 2019, the index methodology has been independently applied by various countries, including Belarus.

The assessment of the sustainability of Belarusian CSOs was conducted for the first time in 2018 and has been revised and re-evaluated since. From 2020 until its liquidation in 2024, it was implemented by the International Educational Research Center (IERC) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Belarusian Center for the Development of Civil Society.

Today, Belarusian civil society actors transcend national ... in Minsk and Belarus, in Warsaw and Vilnius, in Berlin and Tel Aviv ... everywhere Belarusians unite for positive change. Therefore, the index evaluates the sustainability of Belarusian CSOs regardless of their actual location.

In the country where access to reliable information is limited, CSOSI remains one of the few systematic tools that make it possible to understand how Belarusian CSOs operate, develop, and transform in today's tense perspective.

The assessment and publication of the CSOSI Sustainability Index would not be possible without the contributions of many individuals and organisations. We are especially grateful to the individuals who participated in the expert panel and the report authors, who shared their unique knowledge, analytical insights, and expertise, which form the foundation of this Index.

Alena Kozlovskaya

CSOSI METHODOLOGY

The CSOSI Sustainability Index collects and synthesizes key information for civil society organizations, governments, researchers, donors, and other stakeholders. It is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the performance in which civil society organizations operate, as well as the overall social effectiveness, resilience, and vitality.

The Index tracks both progress and setbacks across seven dimensions of CSO sustainability:

1. **Legal Environment** – the legal and regulatory framework governing the CSO sector and its implementation;
2. **Organizational Legitimacy** – the internal equity of the CSO sector as perceived by public;
3. **Financial Viability** – the CSO sector's access to diverse sources of financial support;
4. **Influencing** – the ability of CSOs sector to influence public opinion, as well as state and corporate policies;
5. **Service Provision** – the sector's ability to provide goods and services;
6. **Technical Infrastructure** – support services available for CSOs;
7. **Public Image** – society's perception of the CSO sector.

Each dimension consists of a set of specific assessment components.

Civil society organizations are understood as any registered or unregistered organizations that:

- are not part of the state apparatus;
- do not distribute profits to their founders, directors or operators;
- are self-governing;
- unite individuals and organizations around a shared interest with participation based on free choice.

In light of the structural nature of Belarusian civil society following 2020, the CSOSI assesses the sustainability of Belarusian CSOs irrespective of their current source of location. Belarusian CSOs operating abroad are defined as organizations and initiative groups that by virtue of their origin, membership, mission, or identity maintain a sustained connection with Belarus and Belarusian society. In particular, this includes organizations for which:

- the mission, objectives, and intended impact of the CSO are directed toward improving the situation in Belarus and supporting Belarusian society;
- the majority of involved individuals maintain ties (cultural or professional ties with Belarus);
- the CSO intentionally identifies itself as part of Belarusian civil society and emphasizes this connection in its public communications.

The CSSE methodology relies on data provided by CSSE practitioners and researchers who form an expert panel. The panel agrees on a score for each dimension, which ranges from 1 (poor) to 5 (the most impactful result of sustainability) or 6 (the most advanced). The overall sustainability score for each firm sector is determined by averaging the scores across all dimensions.

Sustainability levels are grouped into three main ranges of development:

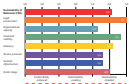
Sustainability advanced	Sustainability emerging	Sustainability impact
6.0 – 8.0	5.0 – 6.0	5.0 – 5.0

Following the expert panel meeting, a narrative report is prepared to substantiate the scores with relevant facts, observed trends, concrete examples, and expert analysis.

CSSE Sustainability Index assessment reports for Belarus and other countries from previous years are available for review on the [CSSE Portal](#) and [CSSE.org](#) websites.

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY:

6.1 (2023: 6.0)



In 2024, the sustainability of Belarussian civil society organizations declined further following the war. The space for civil society continued to shrink, opportunities for systematic development and engagement of the public remained limited and both financial and human resources diminished. At the same time, the influence of organizations loyal to the authorities expanded. The operating environment for CSOs was further affected by Belarus's growing international isolation and its unilateral approach to international cooperation. Despite these constraints, the Belarussian civil society continued to operate both inside the country and in exile, advocating for efficient and transparent Belarusian society.

The human rights situation in Belarus remained in critical condition as of the end of December 2024. A lot of political prisoners were held in detention facilities. Although CSO individuals were pardoned and released over the course of the year, another CSO was simultaneously detained and recognized as political prisoners thereof. Since the summer of 2024, the human rights community has recognized 1,037 people as political prisoners. According to the Human Rights Forum, at least 1,039 people in total were subjected to various forms of repression, ranging from interrogations, detentions, and searches to criminal prosecution, pressure on journalists, media outlets, and bloggers themselves, while repression against the LGBTIQ+ community reached an unprecedented scale, driven both by legislative changes and by persecution of specific individuals.

Large-scale registered applicant NGOs and civil societies continued more than one hundred NGO representations, were held in detention, while arrests, summons for interrogation, and the initiation of new administrative and criminal cases were initiated on an ongoing basis. These practices escalated in early 2020 in the context of reactions to the release of Superintendents, local councils, and the independent Human Assembly and intensified again toward the end of the year ahead of the presidential election scheduled for January 2021.

The campaign to forcibly liquidate registered NGOs in Belarus also persisted: hearings, expulsions (expulsion between 2020 and 2021 at least 4 000 organizations were forcibly dissolved while at least 700 more decided to self-liquidate).

Independent NGOs that continued to operate in the country – particularly unrecognized groups – largely avoided public visibility or were forced to work in an underground manner. Although NGOs in exile and diaspora institutions first significantly lower risk of direct physical persecution, they were frequently labeled ‘terrorist’, subjected to international forms of repression, and confronted persistent financial challenges, without a shortage of qualified staff and a gradual erosion of their public image.

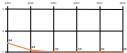
In the same time the authorities actively supported and developed organizations (primarily the state supporting funding organizations) for civil institutions aligned with official state policies and seeking to increase NGOs in the dissemination of state ideology. As a result, organizations that international status were often those: the migration, compulsory humanitarian inquiry within those as politically neutral sphere. In this environment, the boundaries between independent NGOs and government-supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became increasingly blurred.

According to Lawmend, as of November 15, 2020, there were 2 135 registered NGOs in Belarus across these organizational and legal types: public associations (1 173), foundations (308), and non-governmental organizations (654). At the same time the number of newly registered organizations was at least ten times lower than the number of those liquidated. The majority of existing organizations operate in the fields of sports, charity, social assistance, healthcare and education.

Despite the ongoing decline in sustainability, Belarusian NGOs continue – under conditions of repression and profound uncertainty about their future – to adapt to a changing environment, strengthen their professional capacity and withstand pressure, preserving their potential to contribute to long-term social change.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT:

7.0 (2023: 7.0)



In 2023, the legal environment for civil society organizations experienced several changes that were related to legislation regarding NGO activities in Belarus. While some changes – though not systemic – were slightly positive, unprecedented pressure on NGOs and their representatives persisted, including forced liquidation, administrative and criminal prosecution, and widespread threats of self-censorship cases.

The registration procedure for public associations and foundations remains extremely complex, various, costly, and lengthy with a broad range of grounds for denial. The state bar for registering a national public association is not lower, higher than that for commercial entities. Regardless of new governmental establishments and alterations of legal entities is formally clarifying that mandatory pre-approval of an organization's statute has become a significant practical barrier, especially for groups perceived as undesirable by authorities.

Articles of unregistered NGOs, including those forcibly liquidated, are prohibited and considered criminal offenses under Article 337.1 of the Criminal Code. In 2023, the first conviction under this article since its implementation in 2015 was issued against the former head of the Belarus Children's Program, forcibly liquidated in August 2022.

The Ministry of Justice does not publish annual registration statistics. However, according to information provided in response to a request from OSF special procedures, 26 public associations were registered in 2023. In addition, additional reports that 11 foundations and 29 non-governmental establishments were registered during the year, though one establishment failed to meet its registration term.

Forced Liquidation of NGOs in Belarus continued through at a slower pace by the end of 2023, as more organizations had already been dissolved in 2022. NGOs were forcibly liquidated during the year, while at least 140 others chose to voluntarily liquidate themselves.

On July 4, 2023, a re-registration campaign for religious organizations began.

State bodies hardly interfere in NGO operations and internal governance processes. Regulatory mechanisms target both organizations and individuals with operating in Belarus and those who were themselves involved in activities abroad.

In 2021-2024, new licensing, accreditation, and certification requirements were introduced, further reducing the ability of NGOs to carry out certain types of educational, cultural, entertainment, and sports activities.

In December 2024, the Children's Rehabilitation and National Center "Nadezhda" (founded in 1998 for the rehabilitation of children affected by Chernobyl) was nationalized. The status of the charity association "Friends of the Children's Center 'Nadezhda'" (2019) and the Belarusian public environmental association "Living Partnership" (since 2016) were transferred to state ownership under a government decree.

Regulations on public reporting by NGOs require the submission of extensive and often excessive amounts of information.

Methods of NGO representation remain in disrepute. Prosecution of activities with **Real Belarus** has intensified. For example, the Investigative Committee announced the initiation of criminal cases against 25 individuals abroad accused of representing "extremist organizations" and allegedly "impeding the efforts and organizing protests abroad".

Security agencies increasingly designate NGOs as extremist formations, label their members as radicals or participants in such formations, treat their information channels as extremist materials, and thus support for NGOs or their beneficiaries as financing extremism. In 2024, several previously registered organizations – including BHR, the Belarusian National Youth Council (BNM), BPF Belarus, and the International Committee for the Investigation of Belarus – were added to the list of extremist formations. Inactive Real Belarus was returned to those years in prison due to cooperation with the Belarusian Association of Journalists, also designated extremist.

More than 100 cases were documented under Article 28.02(2) of the Administrative Code for using foreign aid for formation or extremist activities or other "prohibited actions" in connection with the **RealBelarus** initiative, which provided food assistance to political prisoners and their families.

Belarusian NGOs operating abroad are also significantly affecting the legislation of the countries where they are located. For example, in 2024 **many organizations registered in Georgia were forced to cease activities there** due to the adoption of legislation on foreign agents. In Poland, NGOs whose management included Belarusians without permanent residence permits faced serious difficulties when opening bank accounts.

NGOs remain significantly restricted in their ability to raise money, and use financial and material resources. Restrictions primarily affect foreign funding – mandatory registration of any received aid is required, as well as donations from Belarusian corporate donors. Private donations from individual residents of Belarus are subject to frozen restrictions.

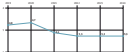
In March 2024, a law was adopted regarding the purposes for which NGOs can receive and use sponsorship support – a prohibition on using any money when creating a political party, movement, social grouping, religious organization or NGO, promoting one movement and/or social climate of any such limited improvements cannot be considered significant for improving the legal environment for NGOs.

The requirement introduced at the end of 2023 forcing electronic only tax filing was removed in 2024 and 2024, NGOs without commercial activity can submit declarations on paper.

Non-legal assistance for CSOs inside the country would rarely be restricted due to more abundance of lawyers and the forced relocation of organisations traditionally providing legal aid in the wartime setting. Consultations from state bodies have improved, though they are often purely formal. A new resource, presidentially appointed, offering informational and legal support related to the establishment and activities of not-for-profit organisations is forthcoming. CSOs operating in exile require legal assistance to navigate both Albanian legislation and the regulatory frameworks of their host countries where they are located.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

5.3 (2023: 5.3)



Overall, the organizational capacity of Albanian civil society organizations remained unchanged in 2023. The CSOs sector retained its ability to function in difficult conditions and adapt to challenges, but opportunities for systemic development remained limited. Differences between more established NGOs and grassroots initiatives remained significant.

According to the needs assessment of Albanian CSOs in strengthening their organizational capacity conducted in May 2020, 80% of an online survey of 70 respondents, CSOs reported that they understood the concept of organizational capacity development. These factors with the same score often mentioned: civil strategic planning and strengthening team competencies. The main obstacles to capacity development still were lack of funding, uncertainty about where to begin, team dispersion across different countries, and political instability.

Despite ongoing repression, 2023 was marked positively from some CSOs in Albania following expansion of service activities.

Engagement with communities was severely restricted by security concerns. After several organizations were designated as terrorist/terrorists (many lost substantial parts of their communities and were forced to close public communication channels), community channels were mostly updated, and communication often relied on informal channels and networks.

Strategic planning remains a common practice across the sector. However, for many organizations it is still treated as a one-time exercise or a short abstract meeting rather than a continuous process. Many newly formed initiative groups do not yet have clearly defined missions or strategic priorities.

Although some organizations developed **monitoring and evaluation** systems and plans during the past year, still lack clear tools for measuring program outcomes, and long-term assessment of organizational performance is rare. Several of CILs during the year conducted organizational diagnostics within the Belarus Health project and some organizations began using external third-party assessment of their capacity, although most did not have clear needs-based requirements.

Internal governance structures within many Belarusian CILs remain insufficiently defined or poorly formalized. A clear division of roles and responsibilities between boards and staff remains elusive or vague, unless paper. At the same time, some organizations have begun improving their governance formalized by establishing governing bodies, supervisory and expert councils, and adopting policies on communication, finance, and conflict of interest prevention.

The situation with CIL staffing in the sector has worsened. The number of paid professionals continues both from Belarus and from the sector (high standards, human and financial strains) of organizations within teams are increasingly limited, including in the main areas of work of Belarusian CILs in strengthening their organizational capacity, more than half of respondents lost those or more roles within their organizations, and many still perform their core functions simultaneously. 77% describe physical and mental well-being of their resources one of the main challenges they face.

Recruiting qualified specialists has become increasingly difficult due to security risks and adverse working conditions in Belarusian CILs. Many organizations still do not conduct labour contracts with their staff. Human resource development occurs primarily through external programs and trainings conducted by other organizations rather than internally.

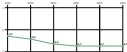
Volunteer engagement inside Belarus significantly decreased due to fear of repression. Among those absent, declining participation was driven primarily by fatigue, shifting priorities, and safety concerns.

The level of public involvement in the sector remained largely unchanged compared to 2020. Most CILs actively use their digital tools such as closed channels platforms for teamwork and communication, and some improved their efficiency through more advanced and informed use of Internet.

Public attention to systemic digital security measures has declined even as phishing attacks targeting activists, independent media, and CILs increased. In many cases, organizations cooperatively assessed this and took additional security measures reactively ... after incidents, rather than proactively while maintaining a high level of sector vulnerability. Personal data protection requirements and GDPR standards were still frequently ignored.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY:

6.7 (2023: 6.7)



The overall financial viability score remained unchanged from 2022, holding at 6.7.

Belarusian OBG sector continues to operate in a state of deep financial vulnerability. In 2024, the situation remained both difficult and inherently contradictory: on the one hand, there were certain improvements in legislation regarding ILO access to domestic funding, on the other there were substantial tightening conditions driven by repression and sanctions. As in 2023, the financial needs gap remained deeply split between organisations still operating inside Belarus and those seeking from exile.

Despite the overall climate of fear and repression, some organisations inside Belarus reported a slight increase in access to domestic funding.

There was cautious optimism regarding the expansion of funding and thematic areas of state social contracting tender in the healthcare and social protection sectors. In 2024, more than half 210 OBG were allocated for services and projects related to HIV and tuberculosis under state social contracting – a 10% increase compared to 2023. Some civil society organisations had their social services contracted by the state, including Health Watch, Positive Movement, People Health, and the Belarusian Red Cross along with its regional branches.

The support allocated from regional and local budgets to support government initiatives increased 1.5 times, reaching 140 million Belarusian Rubles (BYN) applications. However, due to more stringent formal requirements, that many initiatives could not meet state contract conditions for civil society these competitions have also become a tool that privileges certain initiatives while alienating others.

In 20 September a new version of Presidential Decree No. 100 on Sanctions (Sperozvety) has entered into force, expanding the list of eligible purposes and allowing NGOs to receive sponsorship for any activities consistent with their statutory goals. In practice, however, businesses have become less willing to fund NGOs.

Independent registered NGOs operating inside Belarus continue to face substantial obstacles. Donations and financial transparency are still their primary legal funding sources. Access to foreign funding is largely restricted and available only to organisations registered in the state, as only their projects are registered by the Department for Transnational Activities. Independent NGOs still operating in Belarus also face obstructing opportunities to provide paid educational or social services that include international learning, accreditation, and obligatory regulatory requirements.

Capital preparation for donations to funds supporting donors of supervisors ... and other similar initiatives ... continued throughout the year in 2024, yet another wave of projects targeted individuals previously prosecuted for such donations. Evidence is apparent across the country with warnings such as: "If you keep donating then how to pay the price? This has changed the atmosphere of their work services, making even those who had previously supported officially registered charitable funds more cautious and less willing to donate."

For NGOs in exile, access to external funding remained relatively broad with European and UN donors continuing to announce grant opportunities. Between 2020 and the end of 2024, the European Union allocated EUR 1.76 million to support Belarusian democratic forces, including civil society, fully a the number of NGOs abroad continued to grow, competition for funding also increased that released NGOs rely almost entirely on grants.

Some donors, following their security policies, refuse to support projects implemented directly inside Belarus, which pushes certain topics off the agenda. Even when grants are received, NGOs inside the country often cannot meet all contractual obligations due to safety concerns ... for example, requirements to submit personal data of project implementers. Organisations that administer grants for groups based in Belarus ... fiscal partners ... may charge 10-15% of the grant amount for their services, reducing already limited support. Sanctions also significantly affect access to foreign resources.

Throughout 2024, there was a noticeable trend toward seeking alternative funding sources. For example, more organisations began providing paid services to their target groups, often by registering as commercial entities or individual entrepreneurs inside Belarus.

In July 2024, the Belarusian crowdfunding platform Prosveta was launched in six months, it raised EUR 10,000 and emerged as a promising infrastructure solution for small cultural and social projects. However, its ability to raise funds for initiatives inside Belarus was limited as in January 2025 it was designated a sanction formation.

Foreign crowdfunding platforms such as GoFundMe, GoFundMe Belarus, and Buy the a Coffee are largely safe for NGOs inside Belarus but often involve considerable transaction fees and through intermediaries. It is typically impossible to launch a crowdfunding campaign solely in Belarusian registration or address, and many platforms do not accept payments from Belarusian bank cards.

In 2024, the Belarusian bank platform raised EUR 10,000 ... nearly double the EUR 47,000 collected in 2023. The platform allows Belarusians in Lithuania and Poland to allocate up to 1% of their income tax ... 0.5% and 0.8%, respectively ... to selected projects and receive reports on their implementation. Members of other organisations across the list also used similar non-allocation mechanisms. For example, the Belarusian Community and Cultural Center in Vilnius raised more than EUR 8,000 through this channel. Belarusian NGOs implemented abroad, particularly in Poland, increasingly applied for small grants in their countries of relocation.

Financial management practices remained largely the same as last year. Registered CSOs in Bulgaria follow domestic legal requirements. CSOs in civil law enjoy opportunities to adopt efficient financial management practices, but many lack in-house financial managers and do not consistently use advanced accountability and transparency practices, justifying it with costly by-laws and limited resources.

ADVOCACY:

6.2 (2023: 6.2)



The advocacy landscape of Bulgarian civil society in 2024 remained largely unchanged from the previous period of 2020-2021. CSOs that continue to operate inside the country focus mostly on advocating at the level of local authorities and officials state operations, while avoiding national-level agencies or any activities that could attract local media attention. Meanwhile, CSOs operating abroad continue to rely on international advocacy mechanisms, though some have more openly begun addressing their messages directly to the Bulgarian authorities.

Communication channels with open structures have not evolved. The (re)establishing of exclusive mechanisms for national CSOs under the new laws on the foundations of civil society's institutions diminish their advocacy efforts. Petitions – mostly individual rather than collective – and appeals to authorities via social media remain the primary mode. Unlike last year, lobbying as an advocacy channel is gone because the authorities remain in contact with marginalized civil society. The popular platform 'Bulgariya which' based around 300 collective appeals in 2023 (against the same as in 2022), was designated 'harmful material' at the end of the year.

The atmosphere of repression and fear of persecution continues to drive **stop self-censorship among independent CSOs**. Alternative concepts are systematically excluded from official decision-making, and state bodies show no genuine accountability to the public.

Online discussion on draft laws remains one of the few available channels for citizens to influence the legislative agenda. Yet the campaigns are often presented in a formalistic manner without reflective analysis of public input. Only 68 draft laws were put up for public discussion in 2020 – the lowest number since 2015. At the same time, a petition trend that emerged in 2019 provided public engagement in commenting on draft proposals for average, each draft received more than 10 comments, far above the 4.7 average recorded in 2019. 2020. One of the few instances where public input translated into the extension of the discussion period on the highly controversial Health Insurance Code by six weeks, following a joint petition by several organizations.

Government and 'paternal' organizations operate under far more permissive conditions and face no risk of persecution. However their advocacy efforts remain minimal, focusing mainly on other issues such as economic issues, human cultural matters, or filing requests about or responding to an 'at-risk' incident or 'humanitarian situation'. These initiatives often require state support especially when aligned with official ideological priorities, such as campaigns against so-called 'hate' led by propaganda.

Advocacy by NGOs in exile typically involves **public opinion campaigns, petitions, and media coverage** highlighting their affiliations with international actors. Media believe, however, media-related advocacy is increasingly difficult. It rarely appears on international websites or social media, often violating internal rules limiting 'foreign' initiatives, or even websites monitoring those of state institutions.

Almost the main advocacy actors remain in the domestic space in Belarus: Belarussian Helsinki Committee, Office of the United Transitional Cabinet, and the Coordination Council. The Coordination Council holds elections every party registration and has increasingly tried to position itself as a proxy parliament while simultaneously claiming to represent citizens.

Human rights groups, and other NGOs interact with these political structures in mixed ways, primarily through coordination, discussing priorities, shaping positions, and supporting strategizing.

Active advocacy's strongest in countries with the largest Belarusian diaspora – Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia as well as Germany and the United States. The issues that concern most directly affect the daily life of Belarusians abroad: registration and residency, access to healthcare and social services, obtaining passports, access to banking services, and monitoring smear campaigns against Belarusians.

Participation of select Belarusian NGOs in local electional risk issues remains occasional but gradually increasing. One example was a Poland-based campaign following the rape and murder of a Belarusian factory worker in Poland.

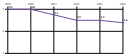
NGOs operating in exile remain highly active. High level international advocacy actors like special procedures and mechanisms like Council of Europe's Contact Group on Belarus, the Helsinki Foundation, and the Belarusian Consultative Group. They also contribute to meetings and some specific media environments designed to shape European Commission policies on handling the Belarusian risk, such as the risk of repression, participation by in-country NGOs of these processes is minimal or takes place indirectly.

Overall, Belarusian society is increasingly treated as a parallel existence – a target of communication and influence, where media may be involved themselves but from which no independent articulation of interests or collective action is expected.

CSDs almost universally **adapting principles** and apply them in interactions with international institutions and host country governments, complementing these efforts with their traditional advocacy work. The role between civil and political actors in fostering progressively liberalised trade between CSDs adapting to the new context and happens mostly behind the scenes. In 2024, civil organisations successfully lobbied for a partial relaxation of newly introduced licensing rules for social services.

Efforts to improve the legal environment for CSDs continued. Key achievements included suspending the requirement to naturalise within just for all organisations on the tax declaration following online using a joint digital signature ... and if they continue to business writing ... and restoring the suspension of public representation for NGOs in the Civil Procedure Code in 2024 years of CSD advocacy on Presidential Decree No. 188 for Sustainable (Sustainability) business finally put off the updated law no expanded the list of purposes for which CSDs may receive sponsorship. Indeed CSDs also advocated for exemptions from the restriction on stable funding for civil society activities.

SERVICE PROVISION: 5.6 (2023: 5.5)



The worsening operating environment and shrinking resources have led to a decline in the diversity, accessibility and sustainability of services provided by CSDs.

In 2024 between CSDs continued to offer a relatively wide range of services, but their **reaching continually decreased** their services were predominantly and increasingly, and many organisations were limited to one-off activities.

The education sector was particularly affected in 2024: many CSDs ... including 180 Belarus, the Free International University Nation of teachers and others ... were deprived by the state as beneficiary organisations), which severely narrowed opportunities for them to provide educational services, especially inside the country. Local organisations continued their operations under new names or in different formats, but that often led to losing their connection to former target groups.

In the meantime, smaller volunteer and local initiatives appeared, experimenting with various formats of services (however, the lack of stable funding and coordination resulted in fragmentation, duplication of efforts, and decrease in the quality of services).

Inside Belarus, an increasing number of services provided by independent NGOs were affected by COVID-19 restrictions. However, these actors are connected by state policies and do not always respond to the real needs and priorities of their target communities.

Belarusian NGOs remain focused on the needs of their target groups, but mainly rely on larger or more experienced organizations, carry out systematic needs assessment and analysis, thereby leaving initiatives only those on intuition and their past experience.

Youth people affected by repression, other vulnerable groups, as well as activists and other civil society organizations continued the primary beneficiaries of NGO services in Belarus. However, access to services became more restricted and increasingly dependent on trust and personal connections within local communities. Information about available support was often not publicly shared, and participation in events could require personal recommendations or identity verification, significantly limiting access for newcomers. The situation for the LGBTIQ+ community became particularly challenging, after mass operations left this country and public activity of relevant NGOs stopped in Belarus, services remained available only to a rather small group.

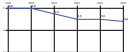
Despite these challenges, NGOs made efforts to improve inclusivity – by considering the needs of parents with small children, people with disabilities, and elderly people, and by ensuring families from across the different regions. According to the study “The Gender Gender Equality and Environmental Sustainability in Belarusian NGOs” conducted by The Belarus Center, NGOs spontaneously introduce inclusive practices. Creating a website, office space, installing gender-neutral toilets, and developing website services for people with visual impairments are among them. However, no organization has yet implemented all relevant practices comprehensively.

The main majority of NGOs – both inside and outside Belarus – continued to rely on international donor support. However, in 2020, more organizations began to partially cover their costs through paid services or by requesting participants to contribute to the cost of training and conferences. In addition, some NGOs in Belarus replaced an international online provider services or facilitated access or with partial self-sufficiency.

The state social contracting mechanism continued to function in Belarus. In the healthcare and social service spheres, but remained available to only a small number of NGOs. In 2020, 24 such contracts with civil society organizations were carried out in the areas of HIV and tuberculosis prevention.

The accreditation of NGOs added value in social service provision remained highly controversial. On the one hand, a targeted information campaign continued in Belarus against a broad range of organizations, accompanied by new licensing, accreditation, and certification requirements, limiting opportunities for NGOs provide services in social, cultural, educational, sports and other areas. On the other hand, the authorities still view a limited number of legally operating NGOs as partners in service delivery. Some state representatives acknowledge that they cannot meet all public needs on their own, expressing interest in NGO expertise and training – especially in social services and fundraising. In the meantime, these processes came with increased state control over NGO activities.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.6 (2023: 5.5)



The infrastructure supporting the Georgian OGB sector weakened in 2023. It remains highly dependent on foreign funding, has limited opportunities for development, and only partially meets the needs of OGBs both inside the country and abroad.

In 2023, Georgian International support organizations and associations that offer OGBs and activists technical assistance opportunities for training, mentoring, and organizing events continued to operate outside Belarus. Access to their services for OGBs inside the country remained very limited.

The closure of the "Napier" space in Tallinn and the Media Hub in Riga – both of which offered mentoring spaces, event venues, and other forms of support to organizations and activists – negatively affected the infrastructure available to Belarusian OGBs in Georgia (in Lithuania, Poland, and Germany, similar spaces continued functioning but faced financial difficulties themselves), new venues for OGB meetings and events appeared in Belarus, although demand for them was low due to security risks, limited resources, and low stability of civil society actors.

OGBs had access to a wide range of training, mentoring, and consulting opportunities, particularly around General administrative programs focused on developing local competencies for civil engagement and OGB management. Thus, GEBC implemented the online course "Belarus Civic Project Management (OGB)" which students received in terms of the number of participants and training effectiveness. The free Belarusian University ran the "Leaders of the Future" program for OGB managers and the "The Future" OGB launched a course on grant application titled "Go it Yourself!". The Belarusian National Youth Council (BNYC) continued offering local advocacy and project management courses and completed a training of trainers' program.

Techniques more specialized for Belarus are available. OGBs also benefited from a course on principles of good governance for OGBs, followed by mentoring and consulting support.

The Initiative facilitated for Bolivian¹ trained participants in the effective use of artificial intelligence in journalism and activism and skills implemented the educational project “Empowerment in Action” focused on conflict management, mediation, and nonviolent communication.

In the same time, many training opportunities remained inaccessible to participants from Bolivia due to the restrictions and security measures. For another problem is the lack of qualified specialists in organizational development, fundraising, and security inside the country. Thus, the sector continues to experience urgent demand for long-term organizational development programs.

Cooperation with actors like WFP's Foundation, the Bolivian Council for Culture, and the Bolivia's Justice project continued collaborating funds received from foreign donors among CSOs in Bolivia and abroad through small-scale competitions. The Bolivian Human Rights House, WFP, and the Civil Society for the Development of Bolivia program provided financial support for strengthening CSOs' organizational capacity. Access to such funding remained significantly limited for organizations inside Bolivia because of the restrictions regime and associated risks for recipients.

According to the study on cooperation within Bolivian civil society conducted by WFP,² Bolivian CSOs overall are ready and interested in cooperation, particularly when operating abroad. Cooperation often emerges in response to common challenges, whereby ready in the desire to optimize resources.

In June 2022, four CSOs working with politically repressed persons... the WFP, the WFP's Foundation, the Genderity Initiative and the Country for Life Foundation... announced the creation of a joint Emergency Humanitarian Aid Center to coordinate efforts and offer support groups the full range of political assistance. Cooperation among women's organizations and initiatives based outside Bolivia and willing to combat gender-based and domestic violence also intensified substantially. CSOs continued partnering to implement joint events and projects.

In the same time, gaps and competition for resources deepened among organizations of different thematic and geographic groups, reducing cooperation and contributing to more fragmented actions.

In Bolivia, cooperation among CSOs remains minimal, occurring mainly through personal networks or at the regional level, while contact with parts of the sector in exile is closed or potentially risky.

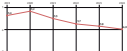
Cross-sector cooperation also remained limited. The Others Forum III, and Initiative for the Bolivian Marched the project “Together for Women... III” in 2022 to restore connections between civil society and media, increase the visibility of CSOs' work, and strengthen the representation of vulnerable groups in the information space.

Interaction with business actors inside Bolivia occurred sporadically and mainly through personal contacts or business associations. For example, the Association of Bolivian Business closed rapid cooperation mechanisms and organized joint events with the WFP's Foundation and the Bolivian Council for Culture. Meanwhile several events were conducted in Bolivia to provide opportunities for social inclusion to women (marketing and financial support from private companies and entrepreneurs). In addition, several projects were implemented in the country with cooperation of businesses, IN agencies, and CSOs.

Interaction between organizations legally operating in Bolivia and those structures were possible only within politically neutral regions.

PUBLIC IMAGE:

6.0 (2023: 5.8)



In 2023, Belarusian OSCE continued to operate under severe repression and a targeted defamation campaign of the sector by state media, while OSCEs were actively filing the pleas at ECHR. Combined with limited media coverage, continued links with society, internal conflicts, and the blurring of boundaries between sectors, this resulted in a notable deterioration in the public image of OSCE – the score decreased by 0.3 points.

In 2024, the media coverage of Belarusian OSCE remained limited and predominantly negative.

The Partnership project enabled systematic distribution in Belarusian state media about an increasing public understanding of civil society. Various civil initiatives are being registered by pro-government organisations... (in order) to maintain the only concept of civil society and sphere of independent civil society by substituting it with initiation structures fully controlled by the state?

In the coming days, even in independent media OSCE activities are insufficiently covered, often presenting them through the prism of conflicts and problematic situations emerging within the sector, while positive achievements and successful practices remain unnoticed. Cooperation between OSCE and independent media was further hindered by the 'humanist' designation applicable one side or the other.

An overall positive analysis of the role of OSCEs rarely appears in the media and does not reflect civil evidence.

In 2024, no accessible sociological studies were conducted specifically examining the image of OSCE in Belarusian society. However, indirect data help illustrate the situation. Thus, in July 2024, 47% of Belarusians trusted human rights organisations, placing them alongside independent media and the Orthodox Church as the top among the most trusted institutions in Belarus.

In 2014, according to the survey 'Belarusian Initiatives' towards the activities of the Human Rights Committee, only 14% of the urban population of Belarus knew more of the activities of non-governmental human rights organizations and allegedly knew the human rights situation.¹ These respondents are poorly informed about the human rights NGOs. 17% do not know any human rights organizations, while many confuse them with law enforcement agencies (31%) and courts (36%). 8% of respondents are familiar with the work of these human rights centers.

A study of the public opinion segment of Belarusian society conducted in May 2014 by the Center for Free Ideas and the 'There is a question' project showed that respondents were most familiar with civil initiatives such as the *Open Partners*, *Human Rights Center*, the *Human Rights Initiative*, *ITPR*, and *BytByt* ... and viewed their activities as beneficial for Belarus.

Belarusian activists report that public attitudes toward NGOs are largely negative, shaping the fact of repression attempts to strengthen their image through political and ideological work rather than through already functioning initiative groups shaped by the promotion of the state agenda. As a result, any interaction with NGOs is often perceived as walking through a minefield ... either critical or dangerous.

NGOs operating from outside Belarus have more opportunities to promote their public image, but realizing this remains tough for them as well. For organizations outside Belarusian territories, the *distance between reliability and safety* is especially acute: even the most well-known organizations often have only one or two public representations, with most work carried out anonymously. This also hinders image building for some it is hard to trust someone who you do not know.

Significant was the distribution of European funding among organizations: outside Belarus and public conflict within NGOs without proper representation about (mis)usage of the money and inflated additional expenditures.

Belarusian authorities continue to treat independent NGOs as a threat rather than a resource for expertise or potential partners. NGOs, by contrast, remain more flexible and serve in the country as instruments of control, replacing independent structures.

In 2014, NGOs attempted to expand their influence and improve their image, but their actions further damaged the image of the sector as a whole after the suspension of the Belarusian Red Cross Society (BRCSS) was suspended from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, it lost more than half of its budget. Representatives of the society appealed to the authorities for support, resulting in a demand for all medical workers in Belarus to pay 1% of their salaries at BRCSS, most of the expenses of the medical workers themselves. Thus, the practice of "voluntary-compulsory" contributions continued in state institutions and universities. In this situation, state television attempted to "highlight" the BRCSS reputation, but instead of addressing corruption, forced contributions, or the organizations' involvement in the forced displacement of children from occupied territories, the focus was on depicting the BRCSS involvement in their market capitalizing using disaster children ... an association that had never been made in the first place.

The Blurring boundaries between centers – NGOs, business, political, and pro-state structures ... also blur the public image of NGOs when the same individuals in different situations appear as political representation, members of pro-state bodies in exile, and leaders of Belarusian NGOs registered in the EU, conflicts of interest are inevitable and public trust erodes. Moreover, evidence both inside and outside Belarus often fail to distinguish between NGO political structures and initiatives.

In its previous years, transparency among independent registered OIRs in Belarus remained close to zero. Even legally operating organisations in the country were often reluctant to discuss their costs openly.

Some OIRs almost continued to publish annual reports highlighting their activities and results, but these reports rarely mentioned internal incidents, organisational challenges or how successful they also shared financial information in the composition of governing bodies and teams, which significantly reduces transparency and accountability of the sector. In addition, many OIRs often refused to publish their reports, sharing them only with partners and donors through closed channels.

Belarusian voluntarily in isolated cases, no shared sector-wide standards of conduct. However, in 2021 an important requirement toward developing professional ethical norms in the media sector from the OIRs: the Belarusian Association of Journalists proposed draft of a new Code of Journalists Ethics and a concept for self-regulation of the independent Belarusian media sector, with the work completed in 2023.