



2019 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

Romania

June 2020



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Cover Photo: Members of the Beresan Youth Bank present their achievements at the 2018 Annual Civil Society Development Forum, an event organized by Ednannia with support from USAID. The Forum is the largest national platform for learning, communication, and experience sharing among nonprofit organizations in Ukraine, typically bringing together approximately 2,500 participants from the non-profit and private sectors, donor community, media, governmental bodies, and local authorities.

Photo Credit: Ednannia, Ukraine

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For Romania

July 2020

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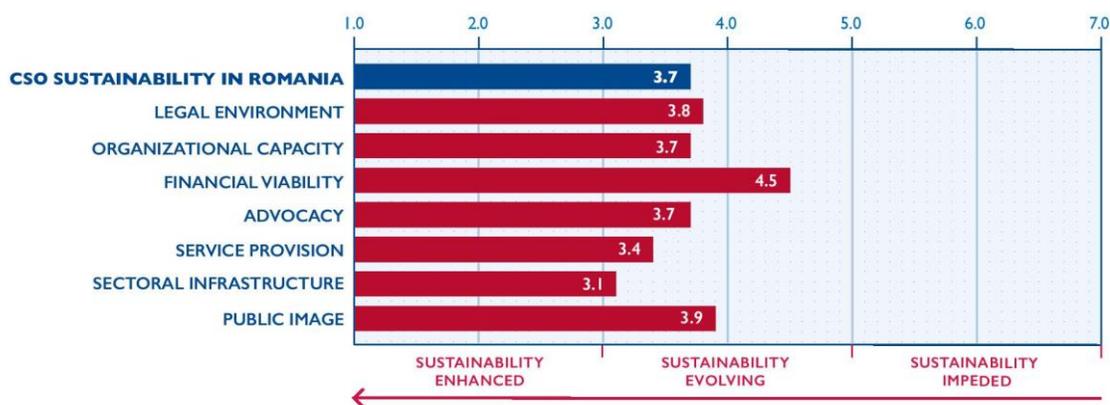
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ROMANIA

Capital: Bucharest
Population: 21,302,893
GDP per capita (PPP): \$24,600
Human Development Index: Very High (0.816)
Freedom in the World: Free (83/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



Public attention in Romania in 2019 was focused on two rounds of elections, a national referendum concerning corruption and the judiciary, and two motions to impeach the government, one of which was successful. In this context, politicians paid less attention to civil society. While this meant that there was less vilification of CSOs and fewer attempts to regulate the sector, it also prevented any sustainable improvement in CSOs' relationships with public authorities.

In the European Parliament elections held in Romania in May, the two main opposition parties surprisingly received close to a combined 50 percent of the vote, while the governing Social Democrats barely obtained 23 percent of the votes cast. On the same day as the European elections, a consultative referendum took place about whether to prohibit any further amnesties and pardons for corruption-related offenses, as well as any further emergency ordinances related to the judiciary. The referendum passed by a wide margin. On the day following the elections, Liviu Dragnea, the Social Democrat party leader, received a sentence of three and half years in jail for using his office to fictitiously employ two party members in a public child protection agency. This created tensions inside the party and the governing coalition and resulted in the eventual impeachment of the government in October and its replacement by a Liberal Party cabinet. In November, the incumbent Klaus Iohannis won the election for Romania's presidency in a landslide, defeating the recently impeached Social Democratic Prime Minister Viorica Dancila.

Despite the turbulent political context, overall CSO sustainability remained stable. The only dimension recording a change in score during the year was advocacy, which improved slightly as a result of the less controversial environment.

The National Non-Governmental Organization Register included 114,548 registered CSOs at the start of 2020, an increase of 6,774 in the past year. However, organizations that registered in 2019 might not be represented on the Register until later in 2020, as courts are not subject to a deadline for updating the registry. Most registered CSOs are associations (93,128) and foundations (19,270). It is estimated that only half of registered CSOs are active.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.8

The legal environment governing CSO operations did not change in 2019. The intensity of new initiatives aimed at regulating the sector eased and attention was focused instead on revising some existing laws and finalizing the adoption of initiatives proposed in 2018. The lack of clarity and predictability of some legal terms and administrative procedures continues to be a challenge, as they allow for discretionary decisions in verification and control processes. In addition, CSOs lack the capacity to ensure full compliance with the norms.



Parliament did not vote in 2019 on one of the most drastic proposals to revise Government Ordinance (GO) 26/2000, which regulates the establishment and functioning of CSOs. The proposal, which was initiated in 2017, would impose extremely harsh reporting requirements on CSOs under the threat of dissolution for non-compliance. Despite the strong objections to this regulation by CSOs and international organizations, including the Venice Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (ODIHR), the proposal remained on parliament’s agenda, meaning that it could be voted on at any time without notice, fostering insecurity within the CSO sector.

After a long and disputed process, in July 2019 the parliament adopted a law to implement the 4th EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive. The version of the law that was adopted only addressed some of CSOs’ grievances and still included unclear reporting obligations. While CSOs are no longer categorized as obliged entities, both associations and foundations are required to report on their beneficial owners to the Ministry of Justice with penalties for non-compliance ranging from fines to dissolution. Any changes in the list of beneficial owners that occur in between annual reporting deadlines must be reported within thirty days. The law is still not clear as to who CSOs’ beneficial owners are, leading to a variety of different interpretations. Moreover, the law requires the declaration on beneficial owners to be notarized, which imposes additional costs and time. As a general rule, the declaration can be made in front of a notary only by the representative nominated in the bylaws; if a CSOs’ decision-making body mandates another person to assume this role, this mandate must also be notarized.

The CSO registration process, which was already quite lengthy and complex, became more complicated in 2019 as founders must now declare their beneficial owners during the initial court procedure. CSOs can only be dissolved through a judicial procedure. Although this procedure is lengthy and complex, it protects CSOs against arbitrary dissolution by third parties, including the state.

CSOs can freely express criticism of the state, but state authorities rarely adjust their behavior or view such criticism as an opportunity for constructive dialogue. CSOs continued to be subject to some vilification in 2019, although the discourse was much more moderate than it was in 2018.

Tax policies that entered into force at the beginning of 2018 negatively affected CSOs. However, some positive changes were made to these measures in 2019 that minimized their impact. Corporate donors are now eligible for deductions for sponsorships¹ up to 20 percent of their owed income tax, or up to 0.75 percent of their annual turnover (instead of the previous limit of 0.5 percent), whichever is lower.

Individual taxpayers have long had the option of directing up to 2 percent of their owed income tax towards a CSO or church or individual scholarship. In 2018, the government raised the percentage of owed income taxes that can be redirected to 3.5 percent but only for CSOs that are authorized social service providers with at least one licensed service. Although the law was eventually amended in December 2018 to allow the increased benefit to be directed towards any CSO, this change will become effective only in 2020 when taxpayers file their tax returns for 2019.

Beginning in 2019, all recipients of sponsorships and individual income tax allocations must be registered with the Registry of Entities Benefiting from Fiscal Deductions. Although the measure was introduced in a law adopted in 2018, the details regarding its functionality, related forms, and information to be provided by the CSOs were only published very close to the deadline for CSO registration. Although the registration process can be completed online, the delay in announcing the needed documents caused some difficulties for CSOs and their relations with corporate donors.

¹ In Romanian law, the term “sponsorship” refers to any financial flow from a legal person to a CSO, while a “donation” refers to a financial flow from an individual to a CSO.

CSOs are legally able to fundraise and earn income, as well as to compete for public funds. CSOs, trade unions, and business associations remain exempt from income tax up to EUR 15,000 on earned income per fiscal year or up to 10 percent of total tax-exempt income, whichever is lower. Revenue from grants and sponsorships is not subject to income tax.

Few CSOs have the capacity or resources to comply with all the requirements of the European Union (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in 2018. In 2019, the Association for Technology and Internet published a list of answers to the most frequently asked questions related to GDPR compliance, while Expert Forum Association mediated meetings throughout the country between the relevant national agency and CSOs.

CSOs require professional legal advice to comply with both GDPR and the Anti-Money Laundering legislation. However, the availability of such advice is limited compared to the needs of the sector. Although interest in providing pro bono legal services has grown over the last couple of years, legal professionals have limited experience related to CSO specificities, as law schools and professional bodies provide very little information on these issues.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.7

The CSO sector's organizational capacity did not change in 2019. While many CSOs understand the importance of engaging citizens in their activities and projects, in practice they find this difficult to do due to the lack of funding to organize meetings, awareness campaigns, or communication activities.

Although the Law on Volunteering, enacted in 2014, provides volunteers with a wide range of benefits, volunteering is not yet common in Romania. According to the Charities Aid Foundation's 2019 World Giving Index, which aggregates data from the past decade, Romania is among the bottom ten countries in terms of participation in volunteering activities. On average, in the past ten years, only 7 percent of respondents in Romania reported that they had volunteered. Furthermore, CSOs

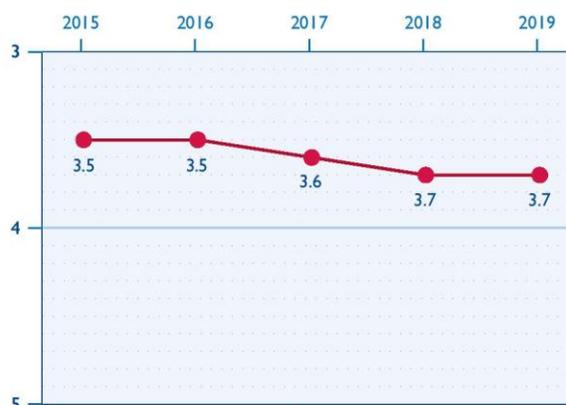
struggle to engage long-term volunteers as volunteers prefer short-term activities. The development of a volunteer culture is also hampered by the fact that most employers do not recognize volunteering as relevant work experience, which may encourage volunteering among young people looking for jobs.

CSOs continue to find it difficult to retain permanent paid staff. The public sector has become much more attractive to employees as it offers greater job security and higher salaries. According to the PayWell study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, since 2017 wages in the public sector have grown by approximately 50 percent. CSO leaders indicate that the highest staff turnover rates in CSOs are among social workers and psychologists. Some CSOs try to attract more student volunteers or employ staff only on a project basis in order to compensate for reductions in staff. CSOs do not have efficient human resource management systems, and employees have limited opportunities to develop their skills through training, career development programs, or coaching.

Few CSOs engage in long-term planning. Most CSOs have missions and visions and recognize the need to implement strategic approaches to their work, but only well-established CSOs develop strategic plans. Smaller CSOs develop their activities based on available financing opportunities.

The internal management structure of CSOs did not change noticeably in 2019. Some CSOs have functional boards, while in other CSOs, the roles of board members are not clearly distinguished from those of staff. In some CSOs, staff members also serve as board members.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN ROMANIA



In general, CSOs have the equipment needed for their day-to-day work. In 2019, however, there were very limited opportunities for acquiring high quality equipment. Some small CSOs received donations of second-hand equipment, but this was not a common practice.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.5



CSO financial viability did not change significantly in 2019. While there were several positive developments that could improve the situation in 2020 and beyond, they were unable to counterbalance the ongoing problems with public funding, the insufficient support for smaller and rural CSOs, and the limited capacity in the sector to earn revenue from the sale of products and services.

Although CSOs have access to diverse sources of income, only a few are able to diversify their funding successfully. Smaller CSOs generally sustain their operations on a short-term basis, usually through donations and volunteer work. These CSOs occasionally receive funding through the tax redirection mechanism, access public funds (local or national) to a very limited extent, and rarely benefit from European structural and

cohesion funds, which are managed by Romanian public authorities. CSOs engaged in some fields of activity, such as the environment, issues facing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community, human rights, and even social service provision, struggle to diversify their incomes as they have access to fewer sources of funding.

According to the report *The dynamics and perspective of the CSR domain in Romania*, issued in 2019 by CSR Media and Valoria Business Solutions, 88 percent of respondents reported that their corporate budgets for corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs have either stagnated or increased slightly. Education, social issues, and the environment continue to be the areas most commonly supported by companies, and interest in the field of health has grown significantly. Although most surveyed companies state that they implement their programs at the national level, CSR programs increasingly reach out to rural areas as well. Long-standing funding programs for CSOs by corporations such as Kaufland, OMV Petrom, LIDL, Raiffeisen Bank, MOL, IKEA, Vodafone, Orange, ING Bank, and Telus International Romania continued in 2019. In addition, a few new programs were launched, including some that address less popular thematic areas. For example, IKEA provided three-year strategic support to CSOs focused on gender equality, education and development, and disaster preparation; Kaufland supported small CSOs working in the areas of environment, education, and health, and supported the establishment of urban gardens and farms in Gradinescu; and LIDL initiated a new program titled *With Clean Waters*.

Beginning in April 2019, CSOs are required to register as potential beneficiaries of sponsorships in the new National Register of Nonprofit Entities administered by the National Fiscal Administration. This caused slight delays in the signing of new support agreements between businesses and CSOs, but overall sponsorship amounts are not expected to be affected significantly given the more favorable legal provisions that entered into force.

As in previous years, the central government continues to provide funding to the sector. There were slight variations in the budgets allocated for different types of CSOs or specific fields of activities in 2019. For example, while there was an increase in funding for national minority organizations, sports federations, and projects focused on combating intolerance, there was less funding for culture and youth projects. Given the limited resources available in local communities, CSOs receive little support from local governments. Local government funding is more common in municipalities and larger towns.

European Structural Funds 2014-2020 and the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 were the primary sources of foreign funding in 2019, in particular for larger and more experienced CSOs. Using EU funds, in 2019 CSOs implemented projects primarily in education, entrepreneurship, employment, local development, advocacy and public policy formulation, social entrepreneurship, and social inclusion. New funding for social entrepreneurship is particularly appreciated, given the lack of support for social enterprises in the past

few years. However, this funding is available primarily for start-ups as opposed to existing enterprises that strive to compete on the open market.

Under the EEA Financial Mechanism, several calls were issued for grants in the areas of culture, inclusive education, poverty reduction, energy efficiency, and education. Funding decisions had not yet been announced by the end of 2019, with the exception of a few projects addressing Roma education. Calls under the Active Citizens Fund, a EUR 46 million EEA program exclusively focused on CSOs working on democracy and human rights, social justice, environment and climate change, gender equality, and gender-based violence, were launched near the end of the year.

The Romanian-American Foundation is one of the few other foreign donors active in the country; it provides annual support of up to \$3.6 million in the areas of rural economy, technology and innovation, civic engagement, and development of philanthropic infrastructure.

As in previous years, the Civic Innovation Fund, a private mechanism funded by the business sector, and the Fund for Democracy, which collects recurrent monthly contributions from individuals, financed small CSO projects.

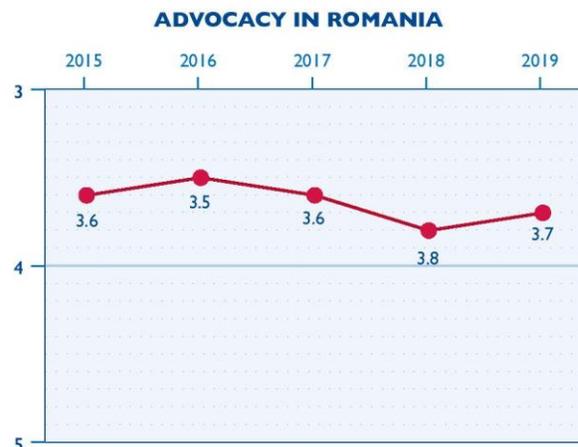
Support from individual donors and constituencies has become more consistent and CSOs have become more creative in their fundraising approaches, which include the use of SMS campaigns, crowdfunding, and local and national fundraising events, such as marathons, swimathons, and galas. The use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to facilitate donations or crowdfunding strengthened significantly in 2019. The platform www.donatie.ro, which facilitates SMS campaigns and direct debits, reported a 50 percent increase in recurrent donations and a 20 percent increase in the number of SMS donations between 2018 and 2019, and the peer-to-peer platform www.galantom.ro reported a more than 50 percent increase in annual donations in 2019. In addition, www.bursabinelui.ro, which facilitates non-commissioned donations, has become an attractive platform for making small donations. Other apps, such as doneaza.pago.ro and MobilPay Wallet, allow users to make recurrent donations to preselected CSOs. Several independent media outlets, including Recorder, Rise Project, Să fie Lumină, and G4Media, successfully attracted donations from individuals to cover significant portions of their operating costs. The online journalism platform Inclusiv raised EUR 104,000 from 1,650 recurrent donors. The tax redirection mechanism remains a relevant source of income for small CSOs and those that are most visible to the public.

CSOs' capacity and ability to earn revenue from the provision of products of services remains limited.

CSOs submit annual financial statements to the national authorities, which are published on the Ministry of Finance's website. However, less than half of legally registered CSOs report their incomes; the rest are either inactive or do not have any income. Most CSOs publish annual reports with minimum financial information online or make them available only upon request. Independent financial audits are not a common practice among CSOs and are generally conducted only at the request of institutional donors.

ADVOCACY: 3.7

CSO advocacy improved slightly in 2019. From the beginning of the year through early fall, CSO cooperation with the government was generally tarred by the lack of trust that has dominated the entire post-2017 period, with public consultations generally being organized only to meet procedural requirements. However, after the new Liberal Party government was installed in October, transparency and CSO involvement in policy-making cycles increased. For instance, the new prime minister consulted with civil society before appointing his new cabinet. However, the sustainability of this new level of cooperation, as well as that of the newly installed government itself, is uncertain given the frail parliamentary majority it holds and the local and legislative elections scheduled for 2020. The Romanian



President Iohannis, a former member of the same Liberal Party, engaged civil society in March before calling for the referendum on the judiciary. However, this positive evolution was in part cancelled out by the president's subsequent refusal to engage in any electoral debates with his political competitors before his re-election in November.

A governmental emergency ordinance issued in February introduced new legislative changes related to the judiciary system and the promotion of magistrates and judicial staff. This ordinance would have resulted in the immediate change of the prosecutors leading two departments in the anti-corruption directorate and was perceived as introducing new forms of political control over magistrates, and thus sparked the most significant protests of the year. Hundreds of magistrates protested in silence on the doorsteps of their institutions while also suspending their official duties for several days. An estimated ten thousand citizens took to the streets in Bucharest and major cities before some of the changes were alleviated through a new emergency ordinance passed in early March. The street rallies were organized informally but were supported by formal CSOs.

While Romania held the Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of the year, CSOs grouped in the informal RO2019 coalition tried to increase CSO input in the official processes related to the presidency, including the preparation of Romania's official positions. While some civil society proposals were included in Romania's official priorities, cooperation with CSOs throughout the process was limited. In June, CSOs presented their positions at the Bucharest International Civil Society Forum, a civil society-organized event, which culminated with a comprehensive open letter addressed to EU decision makers asking for stronger support measures in order for civil society to maintain its role in ensuring fundamental rights for all.

At the local level, transparency still lagged, as evidenced in Bucharest municipality. In June, ActiveWatch and the Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe) obtained a final court decision stating that the rules of procedure used by the mayor's office regarding citizen participation at county council meetings were illegal. The rules stated that citizens had the right to request to take part in the meetings, and not the right to actually take part in the meetings, and failed to specify criteria by which the mayor's office would approve citizen requests. Nevertheless, the actual practice did not change substantially, and critical watchdog organizations still had difficulties participating in council meetings.

In November 2019, parliament adopted legislation severely reducing the role of CSOs in the management of environmentally-protected areas. The initiative was adopted despite strong opposition by local organizations since 2018 and the previous invalidation by the constitutional court of similar changes that had initially been passed as emergency governmental decrees.

Dozens of EU-funded projects focused on improving CSOs' capacity to participate in public policy processes, including the Administrative Capacity Operational Program, were completed during the year. With the support of these programs, beneficiary organizations formulated many policy proposals focused on, for example, improving education for sustainable development in the public school system, improving air quality in urban settlements, supporting the perpetuation of traditional crafts, developing professional standards for early preschool educators, and improving the access to public information legislation. However, it is still uncertain whether any of them will be adopted as legislation.

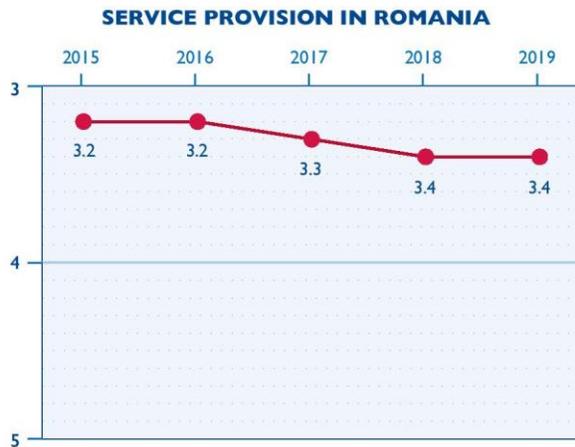
In June 2019, the government passed an emergency ordinance eliminating student reimbursements for long-distance school commutes. Although Save the Children Romania and some of the major student organizations nationwide harshly criticized this decision, their objections had not had any effect by the end of the year.

On a positive note, advocacy by PACT Foundation and MKBT: Make Better contributed to the adoption in July of legislation alleviating the situation of the more than 64,000 families who live in informal settlements in structures built without any legal approval.

In 2019, CSOs advocated, both individually and through informal coalitions, for a more enabling operating environment for the civil sector. While successful in overturning the negative changes made to fiscal provisions, these efforts were only partly successful in modifying the anti-money laundering legislation before its adoption, as described above. The state's lack of interest in genuine cooperation with CSOs was demonstrated by the failed process of reinstating the Prime Minister's Consultative Committee for Associations and Foundations. In August 2019, each ministry was supposed to conduct a CSO selection procedure and make a recommendation to the prime minister's office. However, not all line ministries launched procedures and those that did made the process

burdensome and failed to design criteria to help them make meaningful decisions. As a result, the procedure failed and the Committee remained inactive.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.4



CSO service provision did not change noticeably in 2019. CSOs continue to provide a wide variety of services in areas such as education, basic social assistance, health, environmental protection, civic activism, culture, and youth education. The quantity and quality of services provided by CSOs are affected by the lack of staff and continuous funding. In 2019, some CSOs lost their licenses to provide social services as they had insufficient staff. Due to limited resources, CSOs do not identify community needs through needs assessments, consultations with beneficiaries, and analysis as much as they used to. However, CSOs still offer relevant services to their beneficiaries that respond to constituents' needs.

CSOs' capacity to generate revenue through service provision did not change in 2019. The central

government's subsidies for social service providers increased marginally but are still significantly below what is needed to cover the real costs of service provision. CSOs charge fees for a variety of products and services, including home care services, addiction treatment, and informal or alternative education for children. However, the fees that CSOs charge for their services do not fully cover the costs of their interventions, necessitating them to seek supplementary sources of funding. Some CSOs have started to develop small social enterprises producing goods such as bakery products and handicrafts made by people with different disabilities. Other CSOs are investing in the development of small livestock farms. For instance, in order to help people with disabilities, Betania Association took over a goat farm from Găgești, Vaslui County; it employs people with disabilities on the farm and uses the profits for its activities serving people with disabilities. However, most CSOs struggle to develop social enterprises as they lack business expertise.

CSOs offer their expertise to stakeholders beyond their constituents, including governmental and local institutions, private companies, hospitals, and international institutions. Large, experienced CSOs have partnered with companies to develop CSR programs. For example, MOL Romania developed its CSR Program Green Spaces, which offers grants to CSOs working in collaboration with public institutions to create or rehabilitate green spaces, in collaboration with the Environmental Partnership Foundation.

While both positive and negative examples of cooperation exist, public authorities at the local level generally recognize the role of CSOs in service provision and rely on them to address the needs of different vulnerable groups. Cooperation between the national government and CSOs did not change in 2019. The government still does not seem to recognize the value that CSOs bring in service provision or other fields.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.1

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector did not change significantly in 2019. Dozens of CSOs act as CSO resource centers and provide advice and support to other organizations. For example, CeRe continues to support civic groups across the country, and the Association for Community Relations provides a variety of support measures to help CSOs diversify their fundraising techniques. Support services generally are focused on CSOs in urban areas. In 2019, such activities were reduced somewhat due to the insufficient funding dedicated to capacity building or watchdog initiatives.

While existing coalitions maintained their activities, similar funding problems also limited their actions. Because of insufficient staff, the NGOs for Structural Funds Coalition was unable to respond to all of the issues raised with the increasing number of CSO projects funded through the EU structural programs. Similarly, the Environmental NGO Coalition was largely inactive during the year but began to restructure at the end of the year.

Local grantmaking organizations continued to raise funds and inspire and support community actions. The network of community foundations grew to a total of nineteen with three new entities established in 2019 in underserved regions. In addition, approximately twenty organizations are involved in managing various CSO funding programs.

At the end of 2019, the EEA’s Active Citizens Fund was launched. According to the program’s rules, grantees can allocate up to 20 percent of their total project budgets for organizational development activities, which will provide CSOs the opportunity to develop their long-term sustainability and capacity. CSOs can also build their organizational capacities through CSR-funded capacity-building programs. In 2019, Kaufland Romania’s “In stare de bine” funding program offered CSOs the opportunity to engage in organizational evaluations, planning, and other concrete measures to improve their capacity to manage existing challenges and effectively address future challenges and trends. Approximately thirty CSOs from all over the country participated in this organizational transformation process.

CSOs continue to consolidate their partnerships with independent and investigative media. IREX’s 2019 Media Sustainability Index acknowledges “the efforts of civil society organizations such as freedom of expression NGOs that protested aggression against journalists, politicians labeling media professionals with defamatory language, and attempts at passing restrictive legislation.” Partnerships with the government are still limited, although prospects improved at the end of the year with the installation of a government more receptive towards civil society input. The business sector has strengthened its relationship with civil society. For example, the Code for Romania initiative mobilized individual information technology (IT) experts to use their skills to develop IT solutions for community problems. Local businessman Stefan Mandachi initiated a visible campaign to support the demands of Together for A8, a civic group, for the construction of a highway connecting the impoverished North East region to the rest of the country.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN ROMANIA



PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.9

PUBLIC IMAGE IN ROMANIA



The CSO sector’s public image did not change significantly in 2019. While CSOs made advances in self-promotion, these were counterbalanced by poor cooperation with the government and the rise of alternative civil society, an increasingly visible section of civil society which is less preoccupied with human rights, transparency, and rule of law and often includes opportunists and actors who have nothing to do with the values lying at the origin of traditional civil society.

While the political and media rhetoric accusing CSOs of being Soros foreign agents lost much of its traction in 2019, it was replaced to a significant extent with the vilification of #Rezist, a general term used to refer to all civic protesters. A significant number of high-ranking state officials and politicians, including the ombudsperson,

minister of finance, and various members of parliament (MPs) from the Social Democrats, the main governing party at the time, all used the term pejoratively during the year.

CSOs still enjoy fairly wide media coverage, even on mainstream TV outlets. Coverage is mostly positive, although some prime time talk shows spread the negative political rhetoric. Organizations that address major social problems enjoy the most visibility. One of the most successful such examples is the Daruiește Viața Association, which has made significant progress in constructing a hospital to serve children with oncological afflictions, using mostly private funds. While benefitting from a lot of positive coverage, the association also garnered a lot of criticism, including public insults by Bucharest's general mayor, despite the fact that it is planning to turn over management of the hospital to the public health system.

Alternative civil society became more visible during the year, negatively changing the public understanding of CSOs and the benefits they bring. The candidacy for presidency of Alexandru Cumpănașu, a self-proclaimed civil society figure, had a particularly negative impact on the public image of CSOs. During his unsuccessful campaign, he attracted attention because of his significant wealth, obtained mostly from public contracts, a track record of select organizational cooperation with public institutions, as well as inconsistencies in the higher education he claimed on his official CV. Divisions in civil society were also demonstrated when a group of well-established watchdog organizations harshly criticized the official civil society representatives in the Supreme Council of Magistracy (SCM). After discouraging the protests of Romanian magistrates, the latter were accused of only representing the political interests of the MPs that voted them into the SCM.

There is no polling information available about the level of public trust in CSOs. However, according to the April 2019 Special Eurobarometer 489, 76 percent of Romanians consider it important that CSOs and activists can operate freely and criticize the government or major economic interests without adverse consequences, below the 87 percent average for the entire EU.

While the government's perception of CSOs improved slightly at the end of the year with the installation of a new government, this did not compensate for the continuous deterioration in CSO-government relations since 2017. The business sector, on the other hand, has a largely positive perception of CSOs based on their shared interests in the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and access to education for all.

CSOs continue to use social media, as well as their traditional public events, awards, and galas, to promote their work. Some CSOs experimented with new innovative approaches during the year. Capitalizing on the energy of civic protests over the past few years, the Declic platform organized a major concert in front of the main government building to celebrate Europe ahead of the European Parliament elections, with well-known bands and actors taking the stage on the site of major anti-corruption protests over the past few years. The No Day Without Us Campaign, part of a Europe wide initiative by the European Civic Forum, gained even more traction in Romania and, on December 10th engaged NGOs and activists to communicate more about their achievements by imagining what their communities would look like in the absence of CSO action.

While there are no legal requirements to do so, many, but not all, CSOs draft annual activity reports to satisfy donor requirements. Various attempts have been made to draft a code of ethics or conduct for the CSO sector over the years, but these efforts have not benefitted from significant support or acceptance among CSOs.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*

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