



2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

ROMANIA
OCTOBER 2022



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For Romania

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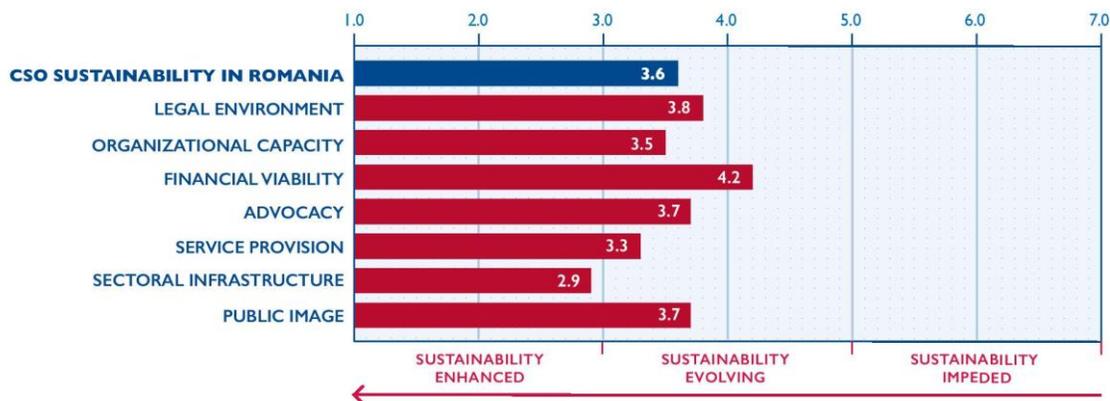
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Erin McCarthy, Michael Kott, Jennifer Stuart, and Kristie Evenson

ROMANIA

Capital: Bucharest
Population: 18,519,899
GDP per capita (PPP): \$28,800
Human Development Index: Very High (0.821)
Freedom in the World: Free (83/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.6



In 2021, Romania's national environment was again shaped by internal political tensions and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The December 2020 elections had ushered in a new governing coalition comprised of the National Liberal Party (PNL), Save Romania Union (USR), and UDMR (a union representing the Hungarian minority). By September 2021, the coalition began to crumble under accusations and disagreements related to the rule of law, management of the health crisis, and coalition management. The government was dismissed through a no-confidence motion on October 5. After weeks of negotiations, PNL and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) agreed on a "grand coalition," despite high tensions and recent confrontations between the parties. The new cabinet was appointed on November 25 with the former defense minister Nicolae Ciucă as prime minister.

According to the Autumn 2021 Eurobarometer, 69 percent of the population felt that Romania is headed in the wrong direction. Civil society's relationships with the government and decision makers at most levels were marked by mutual distrust, despite the government's declared willingness to cooperate, recognition of CSOs' efforts, and commitment to civic involvement in policy making. Populist movements and messages increased in visibility and influence in 2021, as the far-right party Alliance for Unity of Romanians (AUR) continued to gain prominence.

The country experienced several waves of COVID-19 infections during the year, the most severe of which was in the autumn after some restrictions were relaxed over the summer and despite the national availability of vaccines. By the end of the year, just 40.8 percent of the population was vaccinated, compared to an average in the European Union (EU) of 68.8 percent. CSO operations continued to be impacted by pandemic restrictions throughout the year. Of particular note, the limits on public assemblies were kept lower than those set for other public or private events like outdoor festivals, religious gatherings, political conventions, and baptisms.

Following a 3.9 percent decline in the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, domestic demand drove a 5.9 percent increase in GDP in 2021. Though this seemed to indicate a strong economic recovery, World Bank projections for 2022 remained modest at 1.9 percent growth, compounded by the energy crisis and surging inflation.

Overall CSO sustainability improved slightly in 2021, despite the challenging national context. As in 2020, CSOs proved their capacity to respond in times of crisis, stepping in where the public sector was inefficient. An increase in local philanthropy and foreign funding spurred a moderate improvement in financial viability, which in turn supported slight improvements in organizational capacity and service provision. The infrastructure supporting CSOs also slightly improved in 2021 as collaboration within the sector increased, and public image improved with the growth of CSO outreach and visibility online.

At the beginning of 2022, the National Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Register recorded a total of 121,314 registered organizations, including 99,878 associations and 19,168 foundations. Though this data may not

be entirely up to date, the registration rate of new CSOs seems to have resumed its upward trend, growing by approximately 4 percent in 2021 after it slowed during the first year of the pandemic. Less than half of registered CSOs are estimated to be active.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.8



The overall legal environment governing CSO operations did not change notably in 2021, although preliminary steps were taken to simplify and digitize the legal processes related to the registration and functioning of CSOs.

As in 2020, the government opened a pre-consultation procedure on the opportunity to amend Government Ordinance 26/2000 (GO 26/2000), which regulates the establishment and functioning of CSOs. The process ended with no further communication following the July deadline for submission of proposed changes.

In August 2021, the Ministry of Justice announced that it would prioritize simplifying the processes to register and operate a CSO, with a focus on digitalization. To this end, the ministry initiated a separate consultation on

reforms to GO 26/2000, focusing particularly on the transfer of authority over the National NGO Register from the Ministry of Justice to the National Office of Trade Registry. This shift would presumably correct some of the current ambiguities in the registration of CSOs and speed up the process. This consultation process also ended with no follow-up and no draft law was initiated.

In addition, several members of parliament (MPs) drafted two legislative initiatives on the issue of moving CSO registration, operations, and dissolution to the National Office of Trade Registry; both were still under debate in parliament at the end of the year.

CSOs can freely express criticism of the state. In 2021, there were isolated reports of state authorities harassing activists. For instance, two journalists and a Greenpeace activist documenting deforestation in Suceava county were harassed by a group that included at least one local Forest District employee. In another incident, the mayor of Iasi refused to authorize the city's first Pride event, despite the favorable opinion given by the Public Order Commission of Iasi City Hall. The event was still held without authorization, and the authorities did not fine the organizers.

CSO operations continued to be impacted by government restrictions aimed at mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Public assemblies were limited to a maximum of 100 people until August when the limit was raised to 500, while the limits for other public and private events like outdoor festivals, religious gatherings, political conventions, baptisms, and weddings were much higher. (The limit for outdoor festivals, for instance, was raised to 1,000 participants.) In August 2021, the organizer of Bucharest Pride was fined for exceeding the maximum number of participants.

As in previous years, corporate donors can deduct up to 20 percent of their owed income tax, or up to 0.75 percent of their annual turnover, whichever is lower, for sponsorships.¹ According to a law enacted in November 2020, the owed income tax may also be used by an employer to pay for the private education of its employees' children aged six and under. While CSOs make up the majority of private education providers in Romania and are therefore expected to benefit from this provision, this is expected to result in a decrease in the volume of sponsorship for all other CSOs. However, the provision, which was due to enter into force in January 2022, was suspended in December 2021 for the year 2022.

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.

Individual taxpayers continue to have the option of directing up to 3.5 percent of their owed income tax toward a CSO, church, or individual scholarship. A Government Ordinance issued in August 2021 further enabled individual taxpayers to indicate their intent to donate to the beneficiary CSO by allowing the CSO to complete the necessary procedure with the fiscal authorities, as an alternative to the taxpayer submitting the documents directly to the fiscal authority.

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.

CSOs' capacity to navigate the complicated legal system remains inadequate. The availability of legal assistance continues to be limited, and the pro bono legal services and few specialized CSOs that cover these areas are unable to meet all the demand.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.5

In 2021, the organizational capacity of CSOs increased slightly driven by improvements in CSOs' internal management structures and strategic planning.

The Active Citizens Fund (ACF) Romania, which began awarding grants in 2020, contributed to the improvement of CSO capacities. The program, which is part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants 2014–2021, supports the long-term development of the civil society sector with a total budget of EUR 46 million between 2019 and 2024. Grants awarded under the program allow for 20 percent of project budgets to be allocated to capacity-building measures. CSOs have demonstrated great interest in this component, and about 77 percent of projects awarded by the end of 2021 (126 out of 164) included capacity-building activities focused on outreach and constituency building, transparent and accountable governance, effective management procedures, and diversifying funding sources. While some results are starting to be reported from these initiatives, more substantive advances are expected in the coming years.



The COVID-19 pandemic made CSOs more aware of their constituencies and, as in 2020, CSOs worked to respond effectively to constituents' priority needs and develop short-term solutions. However, CSOs' ability to build long-term relationships with their constituencies remains a challenge as public engagement is largely project-based and CSOs lack the capacity to create lasting networks.

According to GO 26/2000, all CSOs are legally required to have written missions and goals in their statutes. Large and medium-sized organizations engage in strategic planning and strive to implement their activities accordingly. In 2021, CSOs began to improve their strategic plans through projects funded by ACF Romania and other grant programs that offer opportunities for organizational development. For instance, in 2021, fourteen small CSOs enhanced their strategic planning capacities with support from Creștem ONG-uri as part of the În Stare de Bine Program, which is supported by Kaufland Romania. However, small and rural CSOs are highly dependent upon donors and therefore tend to shift the focus of their activities to match donor priorities.

CSOs' internal governance improved in 2021. Through ACF Romania, webinars were organized to help CSOs develop transparent management procedures, such as internal procedures manuals, codes of ethics and integrity, and procedures to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. Established CSOs have functional boards, but they are not always involved in decision-making processes, while in many other small CSOs, the roles of board members are not clearly distinguished from those of staff.

CSOs continued to struggle to attract and retain staff in an increasingly competitive labor market. According to a survey by PwC, private sector gross wages increased by 8.94 percent in 2021. CSOs struggled to compete with

these higher salaries, especially in remote areas, and staff turnover remained high. However, some CSOs were able to offer more staff training and skill development opportunities in 2021. For instance, twelve CSOs and companies joined the Transformator program developed by Social Innovation Solutions together with Raiffeisen Bank. For four months, the program provided participants with mentoring from experienced entrepreneurs, access to investment funds, and tools to make the best strategic and sustainability decisions.

Volunteer engagement increased slightly but still remained low in 2021. According to the Charities Aid Foundation’s *World Giving Index 2022*, which covers developments in 2021, Romania continued to sit among the bottom pool of countries in terms of participation in volunteering activities, with a participation rate of just 11 percent (up from 7 percent the previous years).

In 2021, CSOs had slightly better opportunities to acquire equipment such as computers and printers, although such opportunities were still limited. Information security and the use of certified software systems also remains a challenge for CSOs, due to high costs. However, CSOs continued to improve their use of online platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams to communicate with stakeholders and constituencies. Civil society in Romania continued to develop digital solutions to urgent problems in society, including the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in 2021, Code for Romania, together with fifteen of the main funders of civil society projects, launched the Donors’ Platform, on which donors upload information on their funding programs for CSOs to increase their transparency.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.2



CSOs’ financial viability improved moderately in 2021 due to positive developments in local philanthropy and the availability of foreign support. Local government procurement of social services also increased in some major municipalities in Romania.

CSOs’ diversification of income sources varies considerably, depending on the size and field of activity of the organization. Smaller organizations, which account for most of the Romanian sector, continue to rely on volunteering and individual contributions, occasionally receiving funding through the tax redirection mechanism and from companies and, to a very limited extent, accessing public funds (local or regional). Larger organizations, particularly those with paid staff, often manage to have a mix of funding from both foreign and

local sources, including public funds, the private sector, and individual donations. Those working on environmental and advocacy issues continue to struggle the most to access diversified funding.

The amounts allocated to CSOs by the central government and the areas supported did not change significantly in 2021. As in previous years, funding was accessible either directly to national minority organizations, sport federations, and CSOs active in the disability field, or through open calls for projects focused on combating intolerance and addressing vulnerable communities, culture, and youth. Discussions on unblocking funding from the Environment Fund resumed in 2021 but did not have any results. Social service providers continued to receive subsidies at levels comparable to previous years (totaling around \$5.3 million to 9,862 beneficiaries), though this continued to be less than the real cost of providing those services. Changes to the funding mechanism in the social assistance area and in the procurement rules for social contracting were negotiated in 2021, but it remains to be seen if those changes are regulated and applied in 2022.

Local government funding varies significantly in communities, though is generally impeded by relatively low budgets, which have been further impacted by the economic effects of the pandemic. This funding typically focuses on areas like sports, civic education, youth, social, culture, and environment, depending on local priorities. In 2021, one of the largest federations of social service providers reported that one third of its members provide services contracted by local authorities; this showed a clear increase compared to previous years but is still far from being an extensive national practice.

Corporate philanthropy remained a solid source of income for CSOs, though the overall amount reaching the sector was below pre-pandemic levels and the substantial peak registered in 2020 in response to the pandemic challenges. According to a 2021 report by CSR Media and Valoria Business Solutions on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Romania, 76 percent of respondents reported that their corporate budgets for CSR programs increased, with health and education remaining key areas of support, followed by the social field and environment. A significant majority (92 percent) of respondents collaborated with CSOs in the implementation of their CSR projects. In addition, large retailers and online trade platforms, banks, communication companies, and oil companies worked with CSOs in 2021, either directly (sometimes with a CSO as an advisory or support organization) or through their corporate foundations.

As in previous years, European Structural Funds 2014–2020 and the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014–2021 were the most significant sources of foreign funding for CSOs in 2021. These funds support work on education and youth, employment, local development, social inclusion, culture, and health. In 2021, ACF disbursed over EUR 14 million, after funding just a few rapid response projects in 2020. This significant funding opportunity addressed areas that typically receive less support from national sources, such as advocacy and public policy monitoring, civic engagement and participation, empowerment of vulnerable groups, organizational development, and fundraising skills and capacities. The Romanian-American Foundation remains a reliable source of funding for CSOs, and in 2021 disbursed \$3.9 million, a slight increase from \$3.8 million in 2020. That support focused primarily on rural economy, technology and innovation, and civic engagement.

CSOs' significant mobilization in response to COVID-19 positively impacted their ability to raise funds online and engage with stakeholders and volunteers. These improvements, which began in 2020, further consolidated in 2021 and are expected to last.

Additionally, though the tax incentives are relatively simple, the *2022 Global Philanthropy Environment Index* rated Romania as having a favorable philanthropic environment (with an overall score of 4.03 out of 5), largely due to the ease of operating and the political environment (which measures the relationships between the government and philanthropic organizations, as well as public policies and practices regarding philanthropy).

Individual donations continued to be significant in 2021, particularly facilitated by the use of online fundraising platforms and tools. Though 2021 donations did not reach the peak reported in 2020 (when it was bumped by emergency needs with the onset of COVID-19), 2021 amounts still surpassed those of 2019. The platform www.donatie.ro, which facilitates SMS campaigns and direct debits, reported over 5.2 million SMS donations in 139 campaigns over the course of the year, while recurrent donations reached RON 7 million (approximately \$1.68 million) at mid-year. The peer-to-peer platform www.galantom.ro collected RON 4.2 million in donations (approximately \$1 million) in 2021, as compared to RON 5.6 million (\$1.32 million) in 2020. The platform reported fewer donors in 2021 but a 4 percent increase in the average donation size. Event-based fundraising also resumed slowly in 2021, and those with close ties in communities attracted significant resources. For instance, the International Marathon Sibiu raised over \$169,000 for thirty-four projects—double the 2020 amount—while Swimathon Bucharest, led by the Bucharest Community Foundation, raised over \$253,000, the largest amount ever collected through a sporting event. Hospice Casa Speranței raised over EUR 300,000 at its annual fundraising ball to support its palliative care services. Community foundations had some success in 2021 collecting reserve funds, thus indicating an openness on local donors' side to supporting more than just health or emergency response.

CSOs' capacity to generate revenue through the sale of products and services remained limited, but there was growth in social enterprises in 2021, primarily due to EU-funded grant schemes contracted in previous years to support the creation and development of new entities. According to the National Register, over 1,800 social enterprises were registered in 2021, compared to 518 in 2020. Investments and support for the consolidation of existing social enterprises remain low. In 2021, Fundația Alături de Voi, the leading Romanian CSO in social economy, started the process of establishing AFIN, the first nonbanking financial institution focused exclusively on supporting social enterprises; it will begin operations in 2022.

CSOs submit annual financial statements, which are publicly available on the Ministry of Finance's website. Financial audits are not a common practice among CSOs and are generally conducted only at the request of institutional donors and by larger CSOs. Typically, CSOs contract accounting expertise in order to fulfill reporting obligations to national authorities. The sector continues to face a shortage of skilled financial management staff.

ADVOCACY: 3.7

CSO advocacy capacities remained relatively unchanged in 2021. Though pandemic-related restrictions continued for much of the year, they were less restraining in the second half of the year, allowing public assemblies, events, and other traditional methods of advocacy to resume to some extent. On several occasions, the Coalition of NGOs for the Citizen alerted the authorities about the unequal treatment of public assemblies of citizens and CSOs as compared to those organized by political parties, event organizing companies, or religious groups, citing the drastically lower participation allowance for the former (in June the limit was still 100, as compared to 1,000 participants). In August, the government raised the maximum number of participants in public assemblies to 500.



Communication channels between CSOs and government authorities depend largely on the individuals in public office and their openness to dialogue. The central government and national institutions are more likely to adhere to at least the minimum legal provisions regarding transparency of their decision making, although there is significant room for improvement. Advocacy efforts are often challenged by changes in the political arena, such as the October dismissal of the government, which was followed by nearly three months with an interim government. At the local level, most city halls ignore the legal requirements for transparency, and mechanisms for involving citizens in decision making are inconsistent. For instance, according to a monitoring report of ActiveWatch and the Resource Centre for Public Participation (CeRe), in the first year of the current General Council of Bucharest (since fall 2020), only 3.29 percent of the draft normative acts were submitted for public debate.

Two major programs were adopted in 2021 that dominated the public agenda throughout the year: the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), with a total budget of EUR 29.1 billion; and Anghel Saligny, a national investment program for local authorities amounting to approximately EUR 10 billion. Several CSOs criticized the process of adopting these programs, which was hastily done and lacked sufficient public consultation.

After several CSOs—including Funky Citizens, Expert Forum, Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC), Salvati Copiii Romania, Greenpeace Romania, and National Alliance for Students in Romania—signed a public letter asking the government to revise the NRRP draft submitted to the European Commission, the Ministry of European Investments and Projects organized a series of public debates in the spring of 2021. The adopted version of NRRP included an allocation of EUR 43 million for CSO work. However, the mechanism of implementing the NRRP was approved in December 2021 through an Emergency Ordinance before the deadline set for public consultations.

According to an analysis by the Expert Forum, the Anghel Saligny program was also problematic as it failed to take into consideration lessons learned from a similar program implemented in the past. A public hearing was organized at the request of several CSOs, but the program was hastily adopted through an Emergency Ordinance and the process of consultation was not effective.

In 2021, social service-providing CSO platforms—including the Federation of NGOs for Social Services, Federation of NGOs for Child, Dizabnet, and Caritas—launched the Social Platform to provide a single counterpart to the state in discussions related to social policy. The platform already reported some successes in 2021, including a series of concrete discussions with the Ministry of Labor on the long awaited mechanism of direct payments of social services from the state budget at all local levels. In November 2021, the ministry endorsed most of CSOs' proposals and committed to elaborate a draft law incorporating the mechanism. The Social Platform also continued to engage in a permanent and structured dialogue with the National Authority for the Rights of People with Disabilities, Children, and Adoptions on matters related to the allocation of public resources.

CSOs also actively advocated on matters related to access to education, particularly for children in vulnerable situations and given the negative impact of COVID-19 and school closures. For instance, in response to the government's planned reform of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, the Coalition for Education and others raised concerns that the proposed changes were likely to weaken the

institution and increase its political dependency, and hence contribute to the declining quality of education services. Following pressure from CSOs, the Ministry of Education organized a public hearing with more than one hundred participants. However, the authorities appeared to lack interest in a meaningful dialogue as they had evidently made their decision prior to the meeting.

CSO advocacy around environmental concerns also faced challenges in 2021, particularly when the Ministry of Environment promoted an Emergency Ordinance allowing the killing of bears seen as a threat to people and properties. Though CSOs sought alternative solutions, the ministry refused to organize public debates. Also in 2021, the Parliamentary Commission investigating the causes for the rise of energy and gas prices announced that legislation governing protected areas should be amended to allow more investment in hydropower, including inside national parks. While the option was not included in a draft law, CSOs' position about the possible negative environmental impact was largely ignored during the debates. However, CSOs successfully advocated for their inclusion in a list of those benefiting from temporary governmental caps on energy prices.

Access to and quality of public information, which is necessary to ensure meaningful public hearings and consultations, remained both a challenge for CSOs and an area of advocacy in 2021. A draft amendment to the Law on Access to Information (ATI) would have required public institutions to publish all ATI requests and related responses on their websites and increased sanctions for lack of compliance with the law. During the legislative process, however, one party introduced an amendment to allow exemptions for small administrative units and national minorities' organizations represented in parliament. The amendment would have run contrary to the purpose of the law, and due to vocal complaints from CSOs and journalists, the draft law was put on hold in parliament.

CSO representatives in the Social Economic Council who were elected and endorsed in December 2020 improved the work of the institution in 2021. The accountable and transparent behavior they promoted and practiced could influence the performance of the institution in the future and contribute to the development of communication channels between CSOs and decision makers.

CSOs working in the area of social economy actively participated in a working group established by the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity in 2021. The group has been tasked with screening and improving legislation relevant to the social economy, with a focus on ensuring equal status for social enterprises and regular businesses when it comes to state support and special provisions on socially responsible procurement in the procurement law.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.3



CSO service provision slightly improved in 2021 as the diversity and geographic coverage of services provided expanded and CSOs' ability to address the needs of communities and vulnerable groups improved.

CSOs continued to provide a range of services, including work in health, social welfare, basic social assistance, and informal education, particularly for vulnerable groups. Organizations have also become increasingly active and diversified their areas of work. As in 2020, they particularly expanded their work in the field of public health in response to constituents' most urgent needs during the health crisis. For instance, Bethany Social Services Foundation and FIX Theatre addressed the lack of knowledge about health education through an innovative, experiential learning approach among 800

children in rural, remote communities in Moldova as part of a project funded by the În Stare de Bine program.

As more work moved online, the availability of some services—including, for instance, educational and therapy services and personal development for youth—increased as CSOs were able to reach more beneficiaries online. However, in-person activities and services continued to be hindered by precautions and restrictions on gatherings.

Throughout the year, CSOs continued to adapt the content and delivery of their services to meet the needs of the changing environment. For example, Opera Don Guanella Association set up a mobile shower in Iasi that was regularly used by more than 100 homeless people.

Though CSOs have limited capacity to systematically collect data about their beneficiaries, they determine needs through direct interaction with various vulnerable groups (online and offline), monitoring and watchdog activities, and research studies. For example, Mozaiq Association in partnership with Samtökin '78, an Icelandic organization, started to develop an innovative Campus Pride Index to evaluate and monitor the acceptance of LGBTI students in universities. Vulnerable beneficiaries were increasingly engaged in CSO activities in 2021, mainly due to the increase in needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, in 2021, about 6,000 young people from seventeen counties who were not employed, in education, or training (NEET) benefited from online personal development workshops within the La TINERi este Puterea program organized by the Social Incubator Association, part of the #YOUthEmpowered initiative launched by the Coca-Cola HBC group.

Typically, beneficiaries cannot afford to pay for CSO services, inevitably limiting CSOs' abilities to generate revenue through service provision. In a limited number of cases, however, CSOs charge fees for products and services such as home care services, addiction treatment, and informal or alternative education for children.

The government's attitude toward and recognition of CSOs slightly improved in 2021, particularly due to the engagement of CSOs in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. However, civil society relations with the government and decision makers at all levels continued to be marked by mutual distrust, despite the government's declared interest in cooperation, recognition of CSO work, and stated desire to increase civic participation in policymaking.

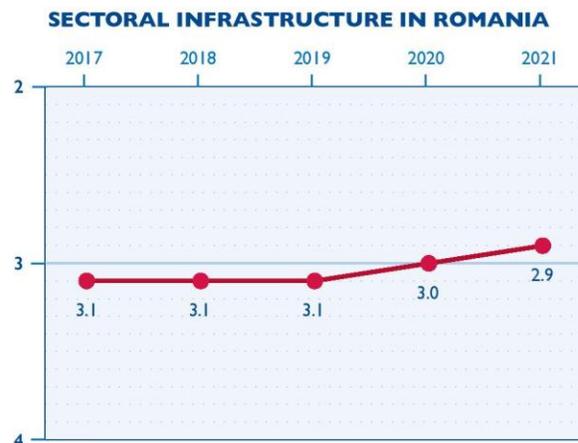
SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 2.9

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector improved slightly in 2021, with more visible and active cooperation within the sector, the greater presence of support organizations, and increased awareness of functional intersectoral partnerships. Still, ensuring diversity and long-term availability of support and services to CSOs, particularly smaller and more rural CSOs, remains a challenge.

As noted earlier, resources provided by the EEA's Active Citizens Fund—with a total of over EUR 14 million disbursed during the year—enabled the expansion of training opportunities and support services available to CSOs. Financed projects could allocate a portion of the funds to organizational development. Furthermore, dedicated financing supported the development of fundraising skills and services supporting CSOs' sustainability; allowed more experienced CSOs to initiate mentoring or capacity-building programs alongside smaller CSOs or local grassroots initiatives; and supported the collaborative work of coalitions, networks, or representative federations of CSOs.

Various support organizations increasingly provided assistance in their particular areas of expertise, including volunteering, fundraising, digital competences and solutions, community development, communication, media literacy, legal or advocacy, civic engagement, fact checking, public budget monitoring, organizational development, and social entrepreneurship. Earned income from such services remains very low, and their provision is largely dependent upon grant-based funding or sponsorships. While the availability of online resources—including training materials and case studies—increased during the pandemic, tailored support and direct contact is essential for longer term effects, especially for grassroots CSOs.

The Romanian-American Foundation continues to act as one of the most active and strategic supporters of civic infrastructure, alongside a few large private companies that have adapted their CSR programs to enable capacity building or collaboration with and amongst CSOs.

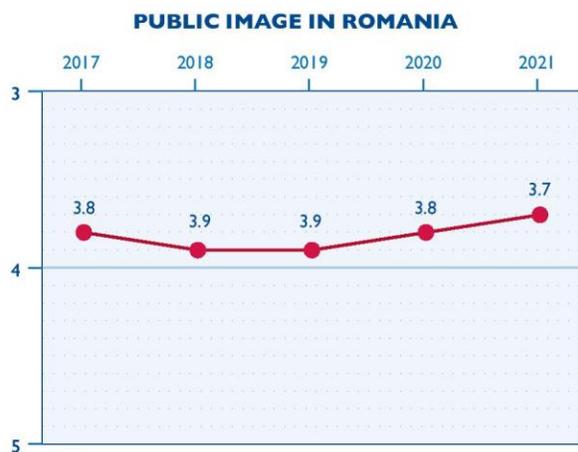


After extraordinary mobilization during the 2020 pandemic, the network of nineteen local community foundations that collaborate as part of a national federation slowly returned to business-as-usual. In 2021, the network successfully raised funds for scholarships and education, thematic funds, philanthropic sports events, and community resilience programs.

Formal and ad hoc coalitions of CSOs were active and more visible in 2021, primarily in relation to defending democratic values and national policymaking. CSO cooperation at local and regional levels varies significantly. Despite CSOs' critical self-assessment on the efficiency of their advocacy efforts and disappointments regarding government responsiveness, their mobilization on key topics in the 2021 public agenda was essential. For example, the Social Platform gathered the largest federations active in the social field to address issues like public funding mechanisms and the use of EU funds to support vulnerable groups. The CSOs for Citizens group actively collaborated on issues like freedom of assembly, transparency and ATI, digital rights, and the protection of civic defenders. Also in 2021, informal groups and coalitions of CSOs worked on issues ranging from monitoring possible legal reforms to defending the rights of the LGBTI community. Other informal groups of CSOs advocated for greater CSO input in the NRRP, and CSO coalitions were active in the areas of education, health, human trafficking, gender and sexual education, and more.

CSO collaboration with other sectors also increased in 2021. There were signs of increased trust between companies and CSOs as they built longer-term partnerships. For example, the Philips Foundation and Philips Romania partnered with Save the Children and donated medical equipment to the #DonateOxygen campaign to support the fight against COVID-19 in neonatology and pediatric wards. CSOs also continued to support private companies in the implementation of volunteering projects for employees and in the development of complex CSR programs. Cooperation between CSOs and independent media outlets, and more generally with investigative journalists, also improved in 2021, providing a better understanding of each other and the potential for consolidation when values and goals are shared.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.7



CSOs' public image slightly improved as they increased their online presence and attention to communicating about their work and results in 2021. This spurred greater acknowledgement from business and government actors, who showed more interest in collaborating with CSOs.

Early in 2021, as COVID-19 cases rose, CSOs working in health care, education, and social support benefitted from greater media coverage and the public better recognized the significant role they play. Organizations based in Bucharest and those that acted as frontline responders against COVID-19 particularly benefitted from national television coverage in 2021. Other CSOs received occasional coverage, based on their areas of expertise and topics of national interest. The local press

in counties like Mureş, Cluj, Bistriţa, Sibiu, Braşov, Oradea, Iaşi, and Suceava has also published materials from CSOs. Typically, CSOs are better known in regions where the national public television and/or radio have local studios or special envoys that feature local programs and reports.

Public acknowledgement of CSO work has notably improved since the start of the pandemic. The public's increasingly positive perception of CSOs was evident through fundraising contributions and support. Public trust in CSOs remained steady in 2021; according to a survey released by the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) in January 2022, approximately 22 percent of respondents had great or a great extent of trust in CSOs, a higher percentage than that expressed in government (15 percent), political parties (12 percent), or parliament (11 percent). Businesses similarly demonstrated a positive image of CSO work in 2021, as seen through ongoing collaborations and donations. In general, there were no threatening or negative campaigns targeting the sector in 2021.

The government continued to publicly acknowledge the role of CSOs in society, especially those involved in the provision of services such as those related to education and health. While the government opened various consultation processes to CSOs, actual consideration of CSO opinions in final policymaking remained limited, as discussed earlier.

In 2021, CSOs increasingly developed their communication skills, especially through social media such as Facebook, to keep in touch with their audiences and share information on their activities. Large CSOs and those that have access to international resources, such as Save the Children, the Red Cross, and the World Wildlife Fund, benefited from notable presence on social media, as did Dăruiește viață, the Princess Margareta of Romania Foundation, Ajungem Mari, Association for Community Relations, Magic Association, Tășuleasa Social, and Conservation Carpathia Foundation. Medium and small CSOs benefited from a primarily regional audience.

Only organizations with public benefit status are required to publish annual activity reports. Despite this, medium and large CSOs generally publish annual reports in which they report on both their work and their fundraising campaigns. However, the publication of those reports is often notably delayed. Smaller organizations often publish such information on their websites.

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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