



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

STRATEGY 2022-2030

2022 2030

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms. The EaP CSF is a non-partisan bona fide non-governmental organisation.





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Foreword

The new Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Strategy for 2022-2030 has been formulated in a crucial and very challenging period of time for both the Eastern Partnership policy and for individual EaP countries. The COVID-19 crisis has not subsided and the situation in Belarus has worsened for civil society and citizens who disapprove of the authoritarian regime there. Security challenges have multiplied and democratic norms and accountability, as well as the civil society environment, have suffered further blows in many countries in the region. In these unpredictable and difficult times, to formulate a new 8-year Strategy for the Forum could be seen as a bold move. Yet for the Forum to remain a crucial platform for regional civil society and to maintain its influence, we need a long-term vision that defines our common interests, what we will strive to change together and what methods we must use to achieve our common goals.

The Forum has come a long way since its inception in 2009 and matured into a knowledgeable community underpinned by personal relationships across all borders. It has also succeeded in pushing the boundaries of what civil society should do in the public space and within policy making processes. The Forum also managed to redefine what our role should be - from a watchdog and service provider to an agent of change and a co-creator of public policies. This increased role and scope also brings about new responsibilities and a need for our own enhanced accountability.

Moving forward, it is vital that the legitimacy of our actions and results are based on representation, engagement, and a clear view of the added value of working together as one regional civil society. This Strategy is therefore an important instrument with which we will jointly plan how to improve our capacities, communication and the delivery of our proposals and messages.

This Strategy is based on a comprehensive consultation process and outlines the four main outcomes to which it should lead us. We see the Strategy as a living document that will guide our planning and activities, while also being useful for all constituent parts of the Forum - individual delegates and members, National Platforms and their secretariats, Working Groups, and the Steering Committee and its Secretariat. We would like the Strategy to be a solid foundation for reporting on our impact, allowing us to deliver better results and develop together as a platform with a stronger voice in the EU, EaP countries and EU Member States.

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About the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is the largest umbrella organisation of civil society organisations from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - the countries of the Eastern Partnership region – and civil society organisations from the European Union. Established in 2009, the mission of the Forum is to ensure effective participation of Eastern Partnership and EU civil societies in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy and in constructive dialogue with EU and EaP decision-makers. The Forum provides a platform for collaboration, exchange and support for its members.

Bringing together around 1,200 organisations, the Forum has built a community of civil societies across the region that come together in solidarity, diversity and with shared values. It is a movement for Europe whose purpose is to make a difference by making sure that the voices of civil society organisations are channelled into coherent advocacy and heard at the highest levels. Its advocacy effort is about finding the most powerful messages from among the myriad ideas generated by the membership, and distilling them into policy papers to engage directly with policy makers and influence political developments. The membership of different organisations, from different countries, with different needs and capacities is an asset: this diversity is where the Forum shines in creating space for civil society organisations to learn from each other, cooperate and forge links. What members value the most are the networking opportunities with EaP and EU stakeholders, access to useful information, joint advocacy, as well as belonging to a regional network and the solidarity it fosters.

This unique platform is made operational by an organisational structure tailored to its purpose. The Forum's National Platforms have been set up in all six EaP countries to ensure the active involvement of civil society in domestic reform processes. Ranging in size from a few dozen to more than 200 members, National Platforms are open to all eligible civil society organisations, and are served by their respective Secretariats. The five EaP CSF Working Groups are the primary centres of expertise where Forum members collaborate to formulate the Forum's opinions and decide on priorities for their respective policy areas. They cover the thematic areas of democracy, human rights, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; environment, climate change and energy security; contacts between people; as well as social and labour policies and social dialogue. The corresponding working groups are also set up within the National Platforms. National Platforms and Working Groups are the principal engines of activity in the Forum.

The Forum's governance bodies are the General Assembly comprising the elected delegates, as the premier decision-making body, and the Steering Committee which provides strategic oversight. The Secretariat, on the other hand, is the Forum's executive body that supports the work of the Steering Committee and the Forum in general, as well as fulfils a critical coordination role. Based in Brussels, it facilitates the interaction between the Forum and the European Commission, the European External Action Service, other EU institutions and Brussels-based organisations and networks.

Being the only institutional actor that represents civil society in the EaP multilateral dimension at all levels of policy dialogue, from the working level to the highest political level, the Forum's privileged relationship with the EU is one of its greatest strengths. Its policy focus and practice of engaging with senior policy makers to raise issues, and then ensuring that actions are taken to address them, enhance the impact of the work of the Forum. The diversity and reach of its membership, as well as the ability to act as the bridge between the grassroots level and Brussels, are its unique assets.

Challenges notwithstanding, the critical work and the mission of the Forum are expected to grow in importance in the future given the increasing realisation that effective policy making requires the involvement of civil society actors. The Forum's contribution in this regard has been exceptional: by providing a platform for dialogue among civil society organisations from the region, between civil society organisations and the EU, as well as between civil society organisations and their respective governments, the Forum has legitimised the work of civil society in the eyes of the public and governments. This has helped improve the reputation and visibility of civil society organisations in their countries which would not have necessarily happened otherwise. The Forum will continue to capitalise on its assets in support of dialogue between the EU and EaP countries on their various paths towards European integration.

OUR VALUES:

1. The promotion of human rights and social justice;
2. Respect for the dignity of individuals;
3. The practice of transparency;
4. The practice of good governance;
5. The promotion of diversity and inclusiveness;
6. The promotion of gender equality and equity;
7. The promotion of people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation;
8. The promotion of environmental sustainability;
9. Opposition to corruption and other illegalities or improprieties;
10. Commitment to realising positive sustainable change.



Eastern Partnership

Launched in 2009, the Eastern Partnership aims to strengthen and deepen political and economic relations between the EU, its Member States, and the six countries in the region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Over the years, the EaP has provided the policy and financial framework for bringing the EU and its partner countries closer together. The framework is built on two pillars: a multilateral dimension whereby the jointly agreed objectives are advanced, and a bilateral dimension in which relations between the EU and each of the EaP countries are strengthened and deepened. The scope and the depth of cooperation are determined by the EU's and the Eastern partners' common priorities and needs, as well as the pace, progress and quality of reforms implemented.

On the one hand, relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are guided by Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, in force since 2017. Visa-free arrangements with these three countries have been put in place to facilitate the movement of people across borders. On the other hand, a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, provisionally in force since 2018, frames EU relations with Armenia, while negotiations on a new agreement are under way with Azerbaijan. With regard to Belarus, the EU has launched a comprehensive in-depth review of the EU-Belarus relations, and the government of Belarus suspended its participation in the policy in 2021.

The EU recognises that engaging with civil society has been critical in ensuring effective implementation of reforms, as the engagement has increased public accountability, advanced human rights and local development, and ensured service delivery to the whole population, including vulnerable groups. Being an official stakeholder, the Forum plays a critical role that impacts on how the Commission cooperates with civil society in the region. Recognising the value of the multilateral dimension, which has created a framework for the discussion of certain priorities that are important for the region at large, the Forum has provided a structure for engagement and facilitated interaction between the EU and civil society organisations, strengthening their ability to speak with a unified voice, provide feedback on EU policies and take an active role in policy making. It has evolved into an instrument for channelling EU financial support to local civil society organisations. It has also been an important source of information for the EU on the latest state of play. Moreover, the Forum has actively supported the creation of regional links, partnerships and knowledge sharing, contributing to an increased resilience of EaP countries, their civil societies and citizens.

External Context

Created to bring the countries on the eastern border of the EU under a single policy, the Eastern Partnership region comprises six diverse countries with a variety of social, political and economic challenges. Yet the region is fragmented, not least because the divide between the three countries with EU Association Agreements - Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, Armenia with the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, and Azerbaijan and Belarus without any type of agreement, is expected to deepen further. Moreover, political developments are unpredictable, as constellations fluctuate, leaderships change and priorities shift.

These already fragile economies have been hit hard by the pandemic and they experienced serious drops in their GDPs. However, the fear of a major economic crisis did not materialise as economic recoveries picked up, and the outlook for the better part of the decade remains positive. The impact of the pandemic has, nevertheless, been profound. Even if the region, with the exception of Georgia, ranks among the least unequal in the world, the pandemic has increased poverty, exacerbated social inequalities, and had a negative impact on vulnerable groups, including low-wage workers and small and medium enterprises. Growing informal labour markets are weakening labour protections resulting in increased labour exploitation. The EaP countries have struggled to access COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination rates remain low, jeopardising recovery. For the duration, the pandemic is set to continue to have a negative impact on democratic governance, the economy, mobility, and people-to-people-contacts, highlighting the necessity for stronger social protection.

Public health measures taken by governments in response to the pandemic, in addition to curbing the spread of the virus, have had an impact on fundamental rights and the rule of law. Measures affecting freedom of expression, including of the media, access to information and the fight against disinformation, the right to privacy and the rule of law have been the most concerning. In an already complex and difficult environment, civil society organisations have faced additional challenges. Not only did they have to adapt their operations to new circumstances and increased demand for their services, but the pandemic has also had a negative effect on their access to funding. In many countries, the already limited opportunities for civil society to effectively engage with governments have been further restricted as the pandemic provided the authorities with a new pretext to avoid dialogue. Organisations reported new difficulties in monitoring the spending of public funds and new limitations placed on their watchdog activities during the lockdown due to COVID-19.

The region is facing profound security challenges, with continuous military and hybrid threats: five out of six countries are involved in protracted conflicts. The outbreak of open warfare over Nagorno Karabakh in 2020 not only affected the stability of the South Caucasus region and had devastating humanitarian consequences, but it also threatened the entire architecture of the EaP, its values, policies and strategies. More broadly, conflicts lead to instabilities which both make it difficult to plan for the future with a degree of certainty, and have a detrimental effect on any democratic development, deepening socio-economic crises. Moreover, societies across the region have become more polarised and more extreme, experiencing growing nationalism and xenophobia, impacting negatively also on civil society organisations.

While the picture is mixed, the region generally does not fare well in assessments of its democracy, freedom, justice, transparency and governance. Azerbaijan and Belarus are the clear outliers, ranked at the bottom of most tables. While the remaining four countries score higher in such assessments, challenges nevertheless abound. Fundamental rights and media freedoms are restricted, corruption is widespread, and the rule of law is weak. Geopolitical pressure from the outside, principally Russia, is seen as another destabilising factor with a wide-ranging impact. A significant gap between urban and rural areas persists. The region is affected by brain drain and demographic decline.

While the region has a history of promoting gender equality, and performs relatively well globally, gender inequalities nevertheless persist in various spheres of life, and changes in laws, social norms and practices are required to achieve equality. Caught between a geopolitical rock and a hard place, LGBTQI+ communities still struggle to achieve full legal protection and recognition, as well as societal acceptance.

Institutions are regarded as weak, judicial systems require urgent reforms, as do education systems. Digitalisation presents significant opportunities for economic and social development; at the same time, it poses a threat to privacy and cyber security. Reducing import dependency and diversifying energy sources to include renewables in a strategic and comprehensive way is a priority for several countries in order to strengthen energy security. In this region too, the climate emergency requires urgent action in order to reverse environmental degradation.

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis, the EU has been by far the largest donor to the region, in support of health systems, as well as social and economic recovery. Yet, barely half of the population in the region has a positive image of the EU,

and around one third has a neutral stance. The EU's reaction to the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, a matter in which the EU has no role, further tarnished its image in the two countries: in Armenia, the EU was condemned for its passivity, and in Azerbaijan, for pro-Armenian bias.

This lack of interest and prioritisation seems to be shared with many EU Member States: while their views about what to expect from the Eastern Partnership have always diverged, it is apparent that the Eastern Partnership policy is no longer a priority for a significant number of them. While some Member States remain traditional advocates of the EaP, there are fundamental disagreements on how to move forward with those Member States that have different geographic priorities or are traditionally more sceptical toward EU integration, preoccupied with their domestic agendas to the detriment of common policies.

Given the government crackdown on the opposition and civil society in the aftermath of the 2020 elections, the situation in Belarus has become the most significant challenge for the region. The EU imposed sanctions, leading to the Belarusian suspension of its own participation in the Eastern Partnership. The outrageous politicisation of the safety and welfare of human beings, resulting in egregious violations of the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers trapped at the EU-Belarus border, marks another escalation in this fraught relationship.

Strengthening the resilience of governments at all levels, businesses, civil societies and communities so that they are better equipped to respond to future crises and disasters will be a key priority in the coming years and a precondition for overall development. The Forum will play a critical role in monitoring, influencing and otherwise supporting this effort, to ensure lasting results, better governance, and better services for people on the ground.

Theory of Change

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Amidst a complex and difficult environment in the region, synergies and connections among civil societies that share common values are insufficient, weakening their voice and hampering their effective engagement in policy dialogue with the EU and national authorities, as well as public outreach.

IMPACT:

In partnership with EU civil society, a thriving, value-based EaP civil society is an agent of change and a watchdog that participates effectively in decision making on democratic transformation and advancing European integration of their countries.

OUTCOME 1:

Enabling the environment in Eastern Partnership countries allows civil society to prosper.

ACTIVITIES for OUTCOME 1:

- Monitoring of political, legal and institutional processes;
- Advocacy to protect and strengthen the enabling environment.

OUTCOME 2:

Civil society holds national authorities to account and strengthens public participation.

ACTIVITIES for OUTCOME 2:

- Evidence and expertise-based engagement with national authorities at all levels;
- Capacity building for national authorities;
- Public outreach.

OUTCOME 3:

The EU is accountable to and supportive of civil society and its effective engagement in the implementation of the EaP policy.

ACTIVITIES for OUTCOME 3:

- Provision of policy advice and technical expertise to the EU;
- Advocacy to advance European integration.

OUTCOME 4:

EaP CSF is a strong, credible and accountable platform.

ACTIVITIES for OUTCOME 4:

- Strengthening National Platforms and Working Groups;
- Strengthening organisational resilience;
- Strengthening internal and external communication.

INPUTS:

Member engagement - Member expertise - Funding - Relationships - Partnerships - Learning - Communication - Solidarity - Political will.

PARTNERSHIPS:

EU stakeholders - EaP and EU national authorities - EaP and EU national parliaments - EaP and EU CSO networks, trade unions, National Human Rights Institutions.

What the Forum Will Achieve

VISION:

A common Europe without walls in which its peoples are treated with dignity and live in solidarity and security in democratic societies which are inclusive, tolerant, just, and environmentally responsible.

MISSION:

To ensure the effective participation of civil society in the Eastern Partnership and the EU in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy, maintaining a constructive dialogue with EU and EaP decision makers, with the goal of democratic transformation and European integration of the EaP.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1: Enabling environment in Eastern Partnership countries allows civil society to prosper

Strategic objective 1.1: Legal frameworks are in-line with international standards and implemented effectively

Strategic objective 1.2: Diversified and sustainable funding is available for and accessible to civil society organisations

Strategic objective 1.3: Civil society has the capacity to operate effectively and is recognised as a legitimate part of society

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2: Civil society holds national authorities to account and strengthens public participation

Strategic objective 2.1: National authorities include civil society in decision-making processes

Strategic objective 2.2: Forum members provide quality expertise and capacity building to national decision-makers

Strategic objective 2.3: Forum members engage effectively with the wider public

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3: The EU is accountable to, and supportive of, civil society and its effective engagement in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy

Strategic objective 3.1: The EU relies on the Forum's expertise in its decision-making

Strategic objective 3.2: Civil society supports the EU in enhancing the multilateral cooperation potential of the Eastern Partnership

Strategic objective 3.3: EU Member States and civil society are actively engaged in the achievement of the Eastern Partnership goals

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4: The EaP CSF is a strong, credible and accountable platform

Strategic objective 4.1: Organisational effectiveness of the Forum is strengthened

Strategic objective 4.2: The Forum is a visible and well-regarded actor in EaP countries and EU Member States

The Forum aims to fulfil its mission through the achievement of four strategic outcomes. The Forum will hold national authorities to account and promote public participation on issues relevant to the Eastern Partnership policy, and hold the EU to account regarding its implementation. To do this successfully, the Forum needs to be a strong, credible and accountable actor; the enabling environment that allows civil society to prosper is a fundamental precondition.

The Forum recognises that the degree of integration and contractual relations with the EU vary among EaP countries. At the same time, the Forum stands for coherence of the EaP policy, solidarity among EaP countries, and the best interest of their civil societies and peoples, regardless of government positions. The Forum also understands that the respective contexts differ, political developments can unfold unexpectedly, and change is frequent.

The four strategic outcomes, therefore, set a general framework for all the countries with the understanding that specific national priorities are tailored to measure for each EaP country.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1: Enabling environment in Eastern Partnership countries allows civil society to prosper

To be an agent of change, civil society requires an enabling environment, sufficient capacities and resources, and a government willing to engage constructively. Equally importantly, it must be able to operate safely. The Forum draws its membership from civil society groups in the EaP and EU countries. It is in the vital interest of the Forum that the pool of such groups be large, and that they be well equipped to participate in decision-making processes.

A civil society thriving in an enabling environment is, therefore, a fundamental precondition for the sustainability of the Forum. Yet, the enabling environment in the Eastern Partnership region has fully disappeared in places. The Forum will, therefore, monitor political and legal developments affecting the enabling environment, advocate for legal frameworks to be in-line with international standards and implemented effectively as well as advocate for the availability of diverse sources of funding, and for the development of civil society capacity.

Strategic objective 1.1: Legal frameworks are in-line with international standards and implemented effectively

The Forum will monitor developments regarding any amendments to legal frameworks affecting the enabling environment. It will flag any concerns and influence any attempts to restrict the enabling environment. It will promote the strengthening of laws relevant to the enabling environment.

Through legal and policy analyses, it will provide expertise on relevant international standards.

Strategic objective 1.2: Diversified and sustainable funding is available for and accessible to civil society organisations

The Forum will advocate for diversified and sustainable funding to be made available to civil society organisations from both domestic and international funding sources. In particular, the Forum will advocate for the establishment of independently administered national civil society funds, and a fair and transparent process of resource allocation. In this regard, it will facilitate the exchange of good practices and provide policy expertise.

Strategic objective 1.3: Civil society has the capacity to operate effectively and is recognised as a legitimate part of society

A strong civil society is critical proof of an enabling environment. Strengthened capacity of civil society organisations will contribute to their increased legitimacy and recognition among the general public. Relying on their extensive and multifaceted expertise, Forum members will share capacities with other civil society organisations. They will offer their knowledge on a broad range of issues, such as the EU, the overall framework for cooperation with the EU, policy development processes more generally, and a multitude of thematic issues. Moreover, the Forum will advocate for the development and adoption of comprehensive national civil society strategies, and a meaningful relationship between governments and civil society so that they can engage in effective dialogue and policy making with a variety of stakeholders at national and EU levels.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2: Civil society holds national authorities to account and strengthens public participation

The Eastern Partnership countries have undertaken a range of commitments under international human rights law, regional human rights and security instruments and mechanisms, but also as part of their agreements with the EU. Civil society will hold national authorities to account and monitor the effective implementation of these commitments. It will facilitate public engagement by acting as a bridge between the people and their governments. In this regard, public outreach with clear and powerful messages is seen as essential for public participation. Where national authorities are not inclined to listen, the Forum will seek the support of partners such as the EU to amplify their messages and achieve impact.

Strategic objective 2.1: National authorities include civil society in decision-making processes

The Forum will advocate for the effective inclusion of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels. It will rely on existing mechanisms for cooperation, strengthen them where needed, and advocate for their establishment where they do not exist. It will seek to enhance existing communication between the authorities and civil society.

Strategic objective 2.2: Forum members provide quality expertise and capacity building to national decision-makers

The Forum will facilitate expertise sharing and cooperation between civil society and authorities at all levels. Forum members will liaise with decision makers and provide technical knowledge and support on a range of issues. They will provide capacity building activities aimed at increasing levels of knowledge and accountability of government officials at all levels of governance.

Strategic objective 2.3: Forum members engage effectively with the wider public

The Forum will act as a bridge between Brussels and the grassroots.

It will reach out to the wider public, especially vulnerable groups, including minorities, and communities based in rural and otherwise less accessible regions, and raise awareness of critical issues promoting the ideas and values of European integration. It will strengthen its external communication channels and messages to ensure that they have a wide reach and increasing understanding and acceptance. It will bring the public together around specific issues, influence views, and change hearts and minds. It will provide fresh perspectives and clear information, also with the aim of improving the standing of civil society in the eyes of the public.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3: The EU is accountable to, and supportive of, civil society, and its effective engagement in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership

The Forum is an integral component of the Eastern Partnership policy with the critical role of monitoring its implementation, providing policy advice and engaging in its multilateral dimension. By providing expertise to and sharing information with EU stakeholders, the Forum will seek to influence EU policy and how it applies conditionality in its relations with the countries in the region. In this process, the EU will be held to account so that it is consistent, principled and respectful of its own values and standards. The EU also needs to provide continuous support for effective civil society engagement in the process of implementing the Eastern Partnership policy, so that reforms at the national level take place in a complete and genuine manner. The multilateral approach will not only strengthen cooperation between countries in the region but also facilitate the approximation of national laws, rules and procedures.

Critical in this regard will be the active engagement of EU civil society and Member States in the promotion and achievement of Eastern Partnership policy objectives and in countering the decline in support for European integration.

Strategic objective 3.1: The EU relies on the Forum's expertise in its decision-making

In its decision-making, the EU takes into account input provided by the Forum. The Forum will continue to provide policy analyses and recommendations, and engage with the EU at all levels of policy making, from working meetings to Summits. The Forum's Working Groups will provide thematic expertise while flagship publications such as the EaP Index will make sound and rigorous analysis available to decision-makers.

Strategic objective 3.2: Civil society supports the EU in enhancing the multilateral cooperation potential of the Eastern Partnership

It is critical for the successful implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy that its regional approach be utilised to its fullest potential within the multilateral dimension, and that the involvement of all six countries remains equally strong, especially given their different relationships with the EU. The Forum will advocate and create opportunities for strengthened regional cooperation. This cooperation will take effect through regional projects, enabling collaboration and exchange of information, experience and knowledge. The Forum will strengthen its re-granting efforts which bring together members from EaP and EU countries at different levels, as well as other partners, and facilitate their interaction with the aim of promoting reforms and bridging the divide between the three countries with association agreements and those without.

Strategic objective 3.3: EU Member States and civil society are actively engaged in the achievement of the Eastern Partnership goals

The Forum will support the active engagement of EU civil society and Member States in the achievement of the Eastern Partnership objectives. It will strengthen the collaboration within the EaP and between civil societies from the EU and the EaP region by providing resources and opportunities for mutual learning. It will advocate for EU Member States to strengthen their commitment to the Eastern Partnership policy. It will communicate to the public in the EU the critical importance of this policy and create opportunities to learn about the Eastern Partnership without prejudice and bias.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4: The EaP CSF is a strong, credible and accountable platform

The Forum will enhance its architecture, building on its strengths and mitigating its weaknesses. In the process, it will ensure that it strengthens its principal value, that of bringing its members together, in solidarity, to share and exchange knowledge, experience and practices. Improving the accountability of the Forum, including of the individual components of its architecture, will be critical in this regard. This will contribute to increasing its visibility, and, in turn, its legitimacy, credibility and the regard in which it is held more broadly, enabling it to be a more effective and efficient platform.

Strategic objective 4.1: Organisational effectiveness of the Forum is strengthened

The Forum will strengthen its organisational effectiveness by enhancing the capacity of its members, diversifying and increasing its sources of funding, and consolidating its principal structures: National Platforms and Working Groups.

Continuously investing in capacity building and organisational development, opportunities and systems for knowledge sharing and peer to peer learning will be expanded, also by establishing the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Academy, creating more effective ways of working and capitalising on existing expertise. Critical in this regard will be strengthening the effectiveness of systems for internal communication, knowledge sharing and grant management. National Platforms and Working Groups will be strengthened by increasing their resources, enhancing their compliance and oversight, as well as introducing accountability systems leading to more strategic membership engagement. Special attention will be paid to supporting members in exile.

Strategic objective 4.2: The Forum is a visible and well-regarded actor in EaP countries and EU Member States

The Forum will strengthen its work outside of capital cities, creating better opportunities for connections and networking. It will improve its external communication to reach the public more efficiently and effectively. It will engage with the public, fill information gaps, conduct campaigns on critical issues and act as a multiplier for engagement with the EU.

The Forum will make its messages clearer, promoting the values for which it stands, and disseminate them more successfully. This should, in turn, raise the profile of the Forum, increase its visibility and, consequently, credibility. This will include working with a broad and diverse membership both in the Eastern Partnership region and EU Member States.



How the Forum Will Deliver the Strategy

Successful implementation of the EaP CSF Strategy 2022-2030 will be made possible thanks to a strong and accountable Forum, where member engagement is high, its expertise is recognised and valued, and sufficient resources are available to enable it to perform effectively. The Forum's commitment to a human rights-based approach will underpin the implementation of the Strategy. The Strategy will be delivered through a Plan of Action which will clarify roles and responsibilities for the achievement of strategic objectives, and allocate the requisite resources. Activities and programmatic interventions will be prioritised in annual planning, and their implementation monitored to ensure learning. Annual planning by National Platforms and their mutual coordination and communication will be strengthened.

Member expertise is one of the greatest assets of the Forum, and the platform it provides for learning and exchange of this expertise is one of its greatest values. To facilitate further expertise sharing, the Secretariat will continue to update its database, mapping out members' knowledge. In the implementation of the Strategy, members will provide policy and advocacy expertise, as well as thematic expertise on the broad range of issues on which the Forum is working. The Forum's advocacy will be evidence-based, derived from its monitoring, research, consultations with members, policy analyses and sound policy recommendations. On the other hand, the Secretariat of the Steering Committee will continue to serve the Forum by facilitating collaboration among members and their interaction with EU-level decision makers. The advocacy opportunities created by the virtue of the Secretariat's location in Brussels will be utilised to the fullest.

To consolidate the Secretariat's ability to serve the members, innovative ways will be sought to increase its capacity. This will include increasing its human and financial resources to enable it to fulfil its coordination role effectively. Avenues for greater involvement of members who have taken on explicit responsibility for the implementation of specific activities will be explored, for instance, by setting up appropriately resourced and accountable ad hoc taskforces. An internal risk assessment will be carried out. To ensure staff wellbeing appropriate policies and mechanisms will be put in place.

Strengthening the organisational effectiveness of the Forum will be critical. To this end, the Forum's governance documents will be reviewed and updated to ensure the Forum's values and brand are clear, visible and unmistakably recognisable. Increasing organisational effectiveness will also entail strengthening the operations of the National Platforms and the Working Groups, the principal engines of the work of the Forum and its centres of expertise. National Platforms will be professionalised to increase their accountability and provide them with the means to deliver high quality work including by increasing the resources of national secretariats and creating permanent staff positions. They will be made more open and their operations more transparent. Moreover, their resources, and their capacity to raise funds, will be increased to enable them to do more, especially at the grassroots level and in regions where they have not had significant presence to date. Regranting, considered highly successful by members, will be increased if corresponding funds are raised. Given the need to strengthen the involvement of members from the EU, a key component of the Forum's architecture, the feasibility of establishing the EU National Platform will be explored.

Moreover, ways to strengthen member commitment to the Working Groups, and improve cooperation between Working Groups at the Forum and national levels, will be sought. Channels for communication and transfer of discussions and learning between Working Groups and National Platforms will be strengthened. In this regard, hybrid methods of collaboration will be enhanced, also based on learning derived from the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Membership engagement will be crucial for the success of the Strategy: the Membership Engagement Strategy will be revised and aligned with this Strategy, and resources will be invested in its successful implementation. Consolidating and rejuvenating the membership base will be a key step, as will continuously clarifying to the members the benefits of Forum membership. This will entail reviewing the current membership in-line with set criteria, and selectively rebuilding the membership base to ensure that Forum values are consistently shared, the sense of Forum identity among members is strengthened, and membership is broadened to encompass a greater diversity of views. This will also help bring new ideas, initiatives and energies to the Forum, so that it is better equipped to tackle the challenges ahead. Based on member analysis and identified lack of expertise in specific policy areas, the Forum will seek new members. Effective engagement of youth groups will be facilitated. The Forum will reach out to organisations representing marginalised groups such as organisations of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, LGBTQI+ groups, and people with disabilities.

The Forum will strengthen its public outreach by getting closer to member constituencies and listening carefully to what they are saying. This will include going to the regions, talking to people, hearing their views, seeing their problems, and then providing them with the services they need, and taking up their issues with the authorities.

The communication plan will be reviewed and aligned with this Strategy to improve the Forum's internal and external communication. This will include seeking technology solutions for an effective member communication system which is agile, responsive and efficient, as well as creating channels between the secretariats of the Forum and National Platforms, and members. It will also include ensuring that messages are clear, strong and reach the intended audiences.

The Advocacy Strategy will be reviewed and aligned with this Strategy and the current reality, setting clear goals and tracking the outcomes. Regional collaboration will be enhanced through more and better joint projects undertaken by members.

The implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy will be prioritised, including by establishing a gender network as a community of practice and centre of expertise which will provide support to members to mainstream gender equality and gender-based approach effectively in their work.

Diversifying the funding base and increasing available resources so that they can buttress the work of the members, their joint projects and outreach will be critical for the successful implementation of the Strategy. In this regard, the Forum will map potential donors and seek ways to increase donor support, in particular core support, and find new strategic partners. Moreover, collaborative and innovative partnerships will also contribute to the success of the Strategy. This will include establishing cooperation with cross-sectoral networks, including businesses, and stakeholders who can amplify the impact of the work of the members on the ground while strengthening the image of civil society among the public more broadly. Special attention will be paid to strengthening cooperation with civil society networks in other EU neighbourhoods.

How the Forum Will Ensure Organisational Learning

The Forum is committed to organisational learning which it considers critical for the successful delivery of the Strategy and the achievement of its objectives. Strategy implementation will be systematically monitored. This monitoring will be undertaken by National Platforms and the Secretariat who will have the primary operational responsibility. The Steering Committee will have overall accountability for the implementation and will report to the General Assembly.

The implementation of the Strategy will be monitored on the basis of a results framework with measurable, gender sensitive indicators. To meaningfully reflect national contexts, indicators of success will be set both at the level of the National Platforms and at the regional level. The progress in the achievement of expected results will be reported on an annual basis in the Forum's Annual Report. To ensure shared ownership of the results, the indicators will be developed jointly by the National Platform Working Group Coordinators, the Steering Committee and the Secretariat. To make the process effective, the Forum will strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as member participation in them.

Halfway through the implementation of the Strategy, the Forum will carry out a midterm review of its implementation. The review will assess the successes and challenges to date, and provide recommendations for its successful delivery to the end of the strategic period, including any changes necessary to ensure its continued relevance.



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