



Structured consultation on the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020

CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE

Country Report: Moldova

This report offers the perspectives of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum member organisations from Moldova on the future of the Eastern Partnership following its tenth anniversary year. It is one of a series of six country reports, with other editions covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine.

The findings presented here are the result of a comprehensive process of internal consultation, conducted in October 2019 in order to inform the EaP CSF's response to DG NEAR's structured consultation on the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020.

The official DG NEAR consultation addressed the fields of 'Economic and Human Capital Development', 'Good Governance, Rule of Law, Security Cooperation', 'Development of Bilateral and Multilateral Partnership with the EU and among EaP Countries', 'Improving Strategic Communication and Visibility', and 'Other Areas'. For the purposes of its own internal consultation, the EaP CSF chose to organise these fields into the following themes:

1. Economic and Human Capital Development
2. Good Governance, Rule of Law, Security Cooperation
3. EU-EaP and Intra-EaP Cooperation: Ensuring Inclusiveness and Differentiation
4. Boosting EU Visibility in the EaP Region
5. Strengthening the Role of Civil Society

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Structured Consultation on Eastern Partnership

The civil society perspective: Country Report **Moldova**

SUMMARY

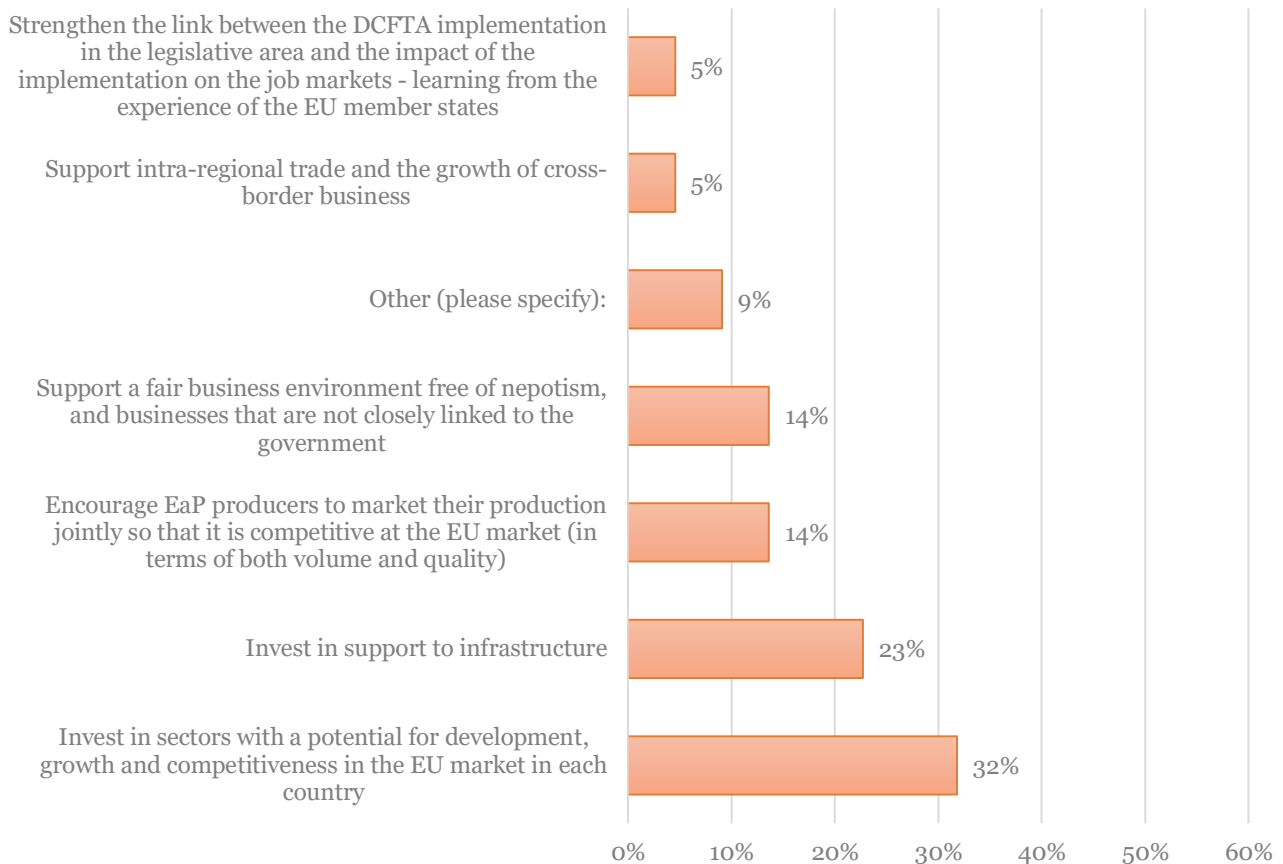
The EaP CSF prepared its response to DG NEAR's structured consultation on the future of the Eastern Partnership by launching a comprehensive process of internal consultation of its membership base. The internal consultation was based on three pillars: six in-country focus groups, four online focus groups and one online questionnaire combining qualitative and quantitative elements. Over 200 civil society organisations participated in at least one pillar of the consultation. The results presented below offer a **detailed overview of the input received from the Republic of Moldova**. A total of 46 Moldovan civil society organisations participated in the consultation process: 22 took part in the online questionnaire, 20 took part in the in-country focus group and four in the online focus groups.

1. ECONOMIC AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Moldovan civil society organisations considered **investing in sectors with a potential for development, growth, and competitiveness in the EU market (32%)** and **investing in support for infrastructure projects (23%)** as the two most urgent and effective measures the EU should promote in order to support sustainable economic development in the EaP region. Although economic cooperation with the EU is very much anchored to the implementation of the DCFTA and the harmonisation of internal market rules to EU standards, Moldova's civil society sees strengthening the link between DCFTA implementation in the legislative area and its impact on the job market as the least effective measure (4.5%).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In your opinion, what would be the most urgent and effective measure that the EU should promote to support sustainable economic development in the EaP region?



Recommendations

Supporting sectors with a potential for development, growth and competitiveness in the EU single market

- Implement programmes to develop and invest more in SMEs. SMEs are the biggest sector of the Moldovan economy, and the one with the largest potential for economic development, especially through the creation of jobs for citizens from rural areas, including young unemployed people.
- Support Moldovan businesses in promoting their goods in the EU market, creating programmes to provide companies with information about EU quality and standards requirements and the documentation required for exporting to the EU, alongside legal counselling, particularly for newly established businesses.
- Facilitate contacts between Moldovan and EU businesses.
- Offer Moldova (and AA/DCFTA countries) access to the EU's Single European Payment Area (SEPA). Opening SEPA for countries like Moldova will first and

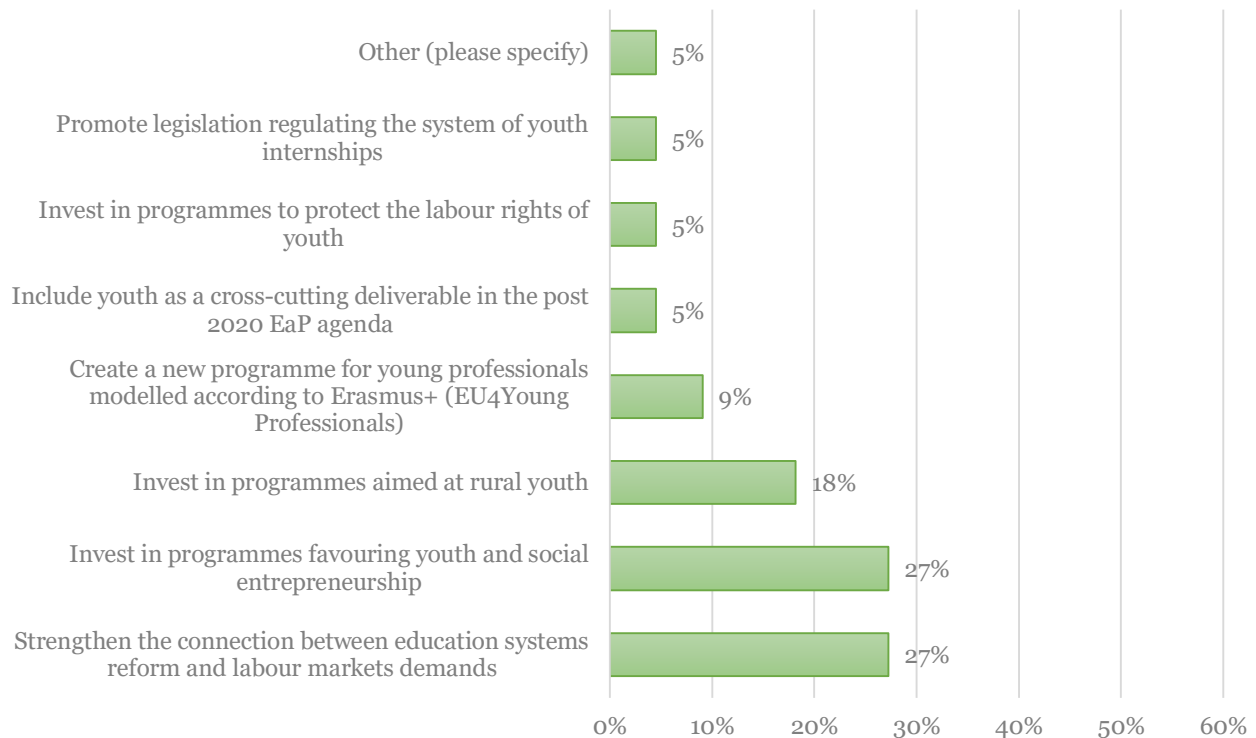
foremost benefit the citizens directly and would potentially provide new opportunities for SMEs' development.

- Support reform of the justice system and eradicate corruption through cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to support the development of a corruption-free economic environment.
- Provide much more consistent support to civil society organisations monitoring fraud and money laundering activities, as these practices stand in the way of a healthy business sector.
- Continue supporting the Moldovan agricultural sector, particularly bio products and organic farming, with the objective of making it more competitive in the EU market. Assist in implementing EU rules and standards on meat, eggs, dairy products etc.
- Prioritise the IT, transport and energy sectors within financial envelopes and frameworks.
- Support economic growth via public investment in local and national infrastructure, and facilitate private investments via EC private investment guarantee plans. These elements are key for national development, as in turn they generate employment, public and private investments, and tax incomes that the state can reinvest to create wealth and further growth.

According to Moldovan civil society organisations, the most urgent measures to be taken into account by the EU in order to empower young people and address the economic challenges they are facing are **to invest in programmes favouring youth and social entrepreneurship** and **to strengthen the connection between education systems reform and labour market demands (27%)**. Another important action would be **investment in programmes which aim at young people coming from rural areas (18%)**, since this category is one of the most vulnerable and lacks socio-economic opportunities, compared to young people from urban areas.

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

In your opinion, what would be the most urgent and effective measure that the EU should promote to further empower youth and address the economic challenges they are facing?



Recommendations

Youth, Education and Labour market

- Support policy design based on the specific needs of young people. Most existing employment or entrepreneurial policies have no targeted approach, and do not integrate the specific needs different age groups.
- Support the development of a mechanisms for paid internships, since lack of experience is the first cause of unemployment in Moldova.
- Promote the participation and consultation of youth organisations in the process of developing national youth programmes.
- Invest in public outreach services which would offer training or employment opportunities to marginalised youths. Existing public services fail to reach NEETs (Not in education, employment, or training), when these should be a primary focus of their activities.
- Support establishing a mechanism to address the issue of skills mismatch, ensuring a correlation between educational programmes and the needs of employers.

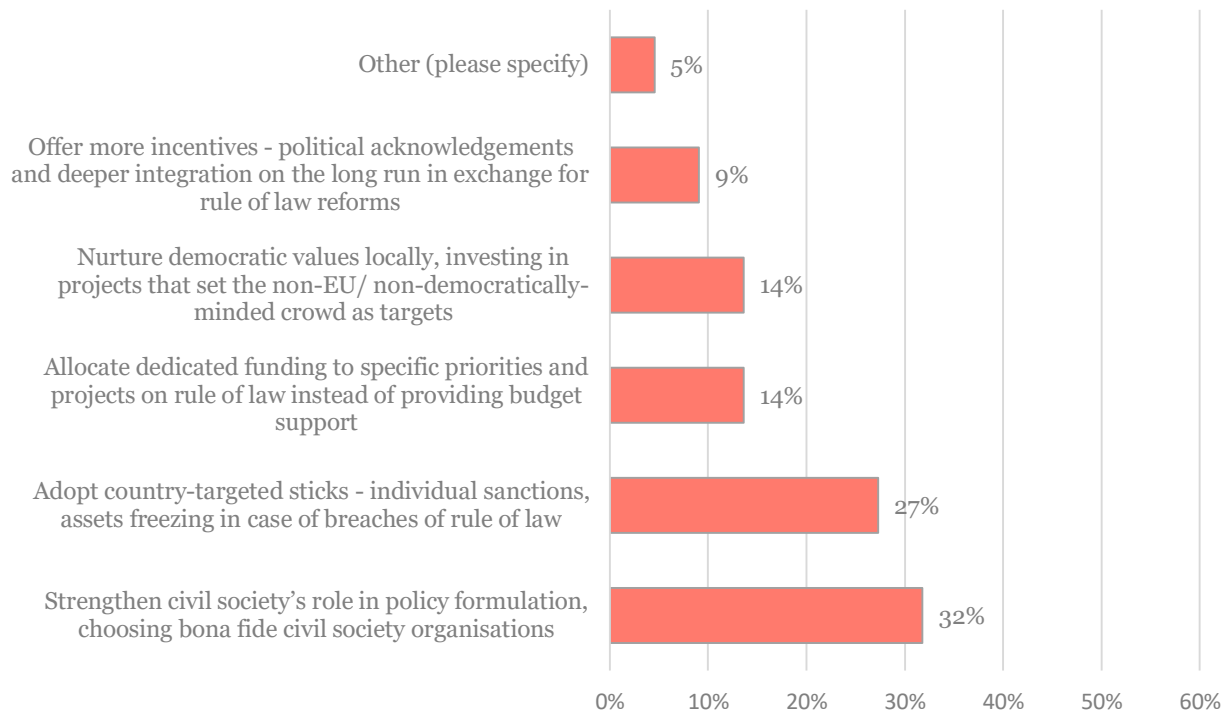
- Open the possibility to apply to the EACEA with Erasmus+ KA1 projects to organisations from EaP countries. Introduce the option to allocate a minimum quota (of 10-25% from the annual budget) for the projects with partners from Eastern Partnership region within the new Erasmus+ programme.
- Prioritise support to Vocational Educational Training (VET). Support higher education mobility. Invest in formal and non-formal education programmes, and support the capacities of education CSOs that can provide services to the state on career orientation, ICT tools and technology.
- Support the creation of job opportunities for young people in their home country, so that they can return after studying or training abroad, including by supporting youth entrepreneurship.
- Involve young people in the youth policy decision-making process, as they should have a say on their future.

2. GOOD GOVERNANCE, RULE OF LAW, SECURITY COOPERATION

According to respondents from Moldova, the most urgent and effective measure to support good governance and rule of law reform in the EaP countries is to **strengthen civil society's role in policy formulation, choosing bona fide CSOs** (32%). In addition, the adoption of country-targeted 'sticks' – individual sanctions, assets freezing – in case of breaches of rule of law by public officials would be another effective measure (28%).

RULE OF LAW & GOOD GOVERNANCE

In your opinion, what would be the most urgent and effective measure that the EU could promote to support good governance and rule of law reform in the EaP?



Recommendations

Rule of Law

- Ensure the involvement of civil society as a principal partner and ally of the government through strengthened financing to independent NGOs.
- Keep monitoring amendments to the electoral law by applying stronger conditionality, linking reform outcomes to macro-financial assistance, and coordinating actions with other international financial institutions and partners. Conditioning financial assistance represents an effective form of leverage that should be used across the EaP region.
- Support local democracy and local authorities by strengthening and building the local constituency, involving civil society, local businesses and other local stakeholders.
- Insist on the application of effective punitive measures against individuals within the government and public service who do not meet the integrity standards.
- Increase operational cooperation between the EaP and EU countries, including via relevant EU institutions focused on implementation of anticorruption programmes. The establishment of anti-corruption (AC) bodies and mechanisms



for income and asset declaration, as well as declaration of conflicts of interest have already produced concrete results in Moldova.

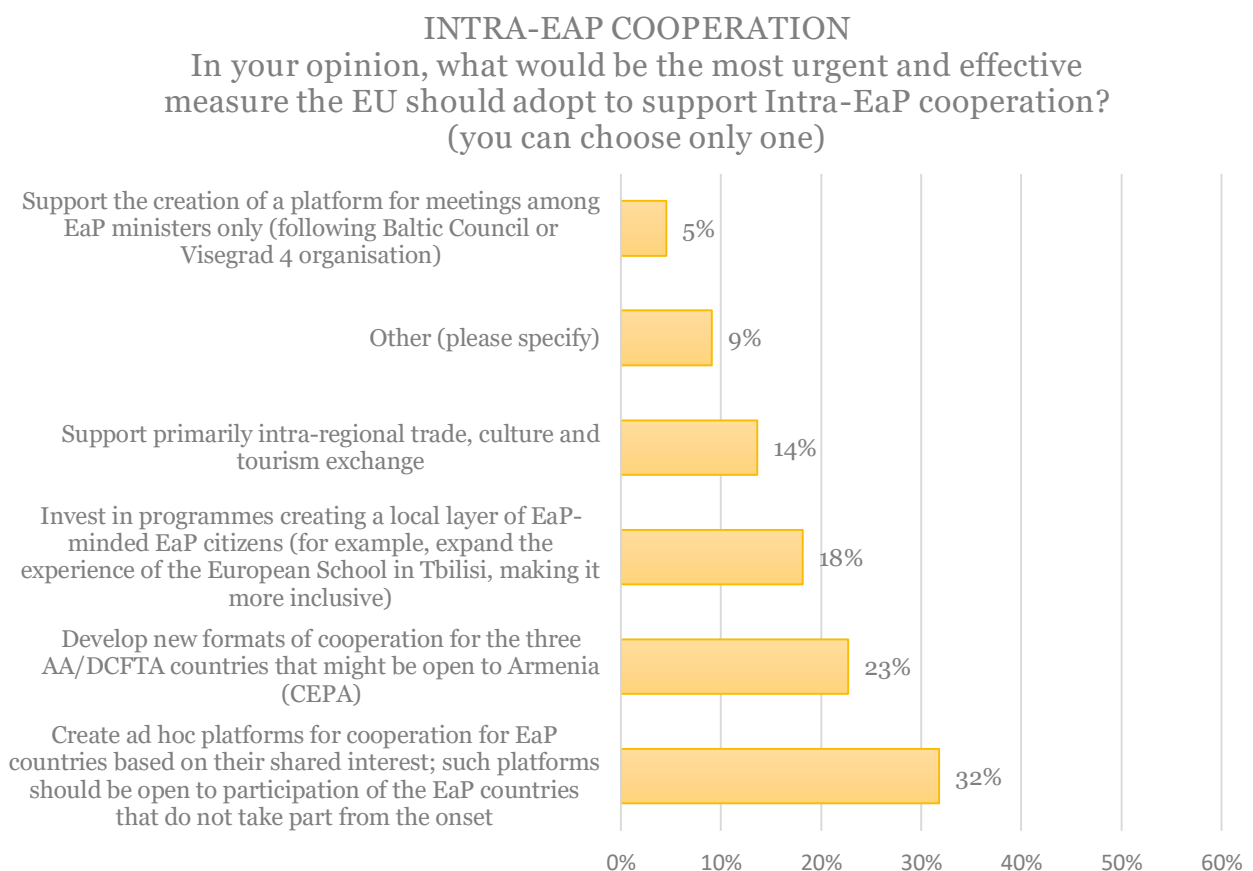
- Support more coordination with the Moldovan government and among the Moldovan authorities on the implementation of policies targeting money-laundering, and corruption in education and healthcare.
- Support the judiciary's strengthened accountability and independence, building on the positive results of previously adopted measures like EU monitoring, which put pressure on decision makers and enabled the adoption of important amendments to laws regulating the justice system. Introduce and support twinning projects between public authorities, in particular the judiciary, to allow the exchange of good practices with their EU and EaP counterparts.
- Strengthen the public sector, with a particular focus on capacity building of elected officials at the local level. Insist on the accountability and personal integrity of elected officials at both the central and local levels.
- Support free media and watchdogs, which enhance democratic competition thanks to their independence from oligarchs, and put positive pressure on political elites to promote durable reforms.
- Approve a (Magnitsky-style) human rights sanctions regime and apply it against individuals in EaP countries who are guilty of human rights abuses, state capture and corruption.
- Strengthen support for the mechanisms protecting human rights defenders and investigative journalists in the EaP region, since fear of criminal prosecution causes civil society activists and journalists to give up their professions.

Security – countering hybrid threats

- Prioritise the fight against Russian propaganda. Support measures combatting misinformation from both foreign and local media, and develop a strategy for communication and counteracting the real and eventual dangers this misinformation poses to national security. The strategy should consider creating dedicated, ad hoc task forces for its implementation.
- Promote a specialised intergovernmental security platform between the EaP and the EU member states, dedicated to countering hybrid threats. The EU should also facilitate the creation of a national security risk assessment mechanism and effective early warning systems for hybrid threats in EaP countries.

3. EU-EAP AND INTRA-EAP COOPERATION: ENSURING INCLUSIVENESS AND DIFFERENTIATION

The results of the survey show that the largest proportion of Moldovan respondents (32%) see **creating ad hoc platforms for cooperation for EaP countries based on their shared interest and that should be open to participation of EaP countries that do not take part from the onset** as the most efficient way for the EU to strengthen the intra-EaP cooperation. This is followed by **developing new formats of cooperation for the three AA/DCFTA countries that might be open to Armenia (CEPA)**, favoured by 23%.



Recommendations:

- Support and facilitate dialogue on sensitive transboundary environmental problems.
- Adapt best practices learnt from regional cooperation between the EU and Western Balkan countries for the EaP region.
- Set-up a high-level EaP secretariat with the participation of EU and EaP experts and diplomats, to improve joint ownership and increase responsibility and

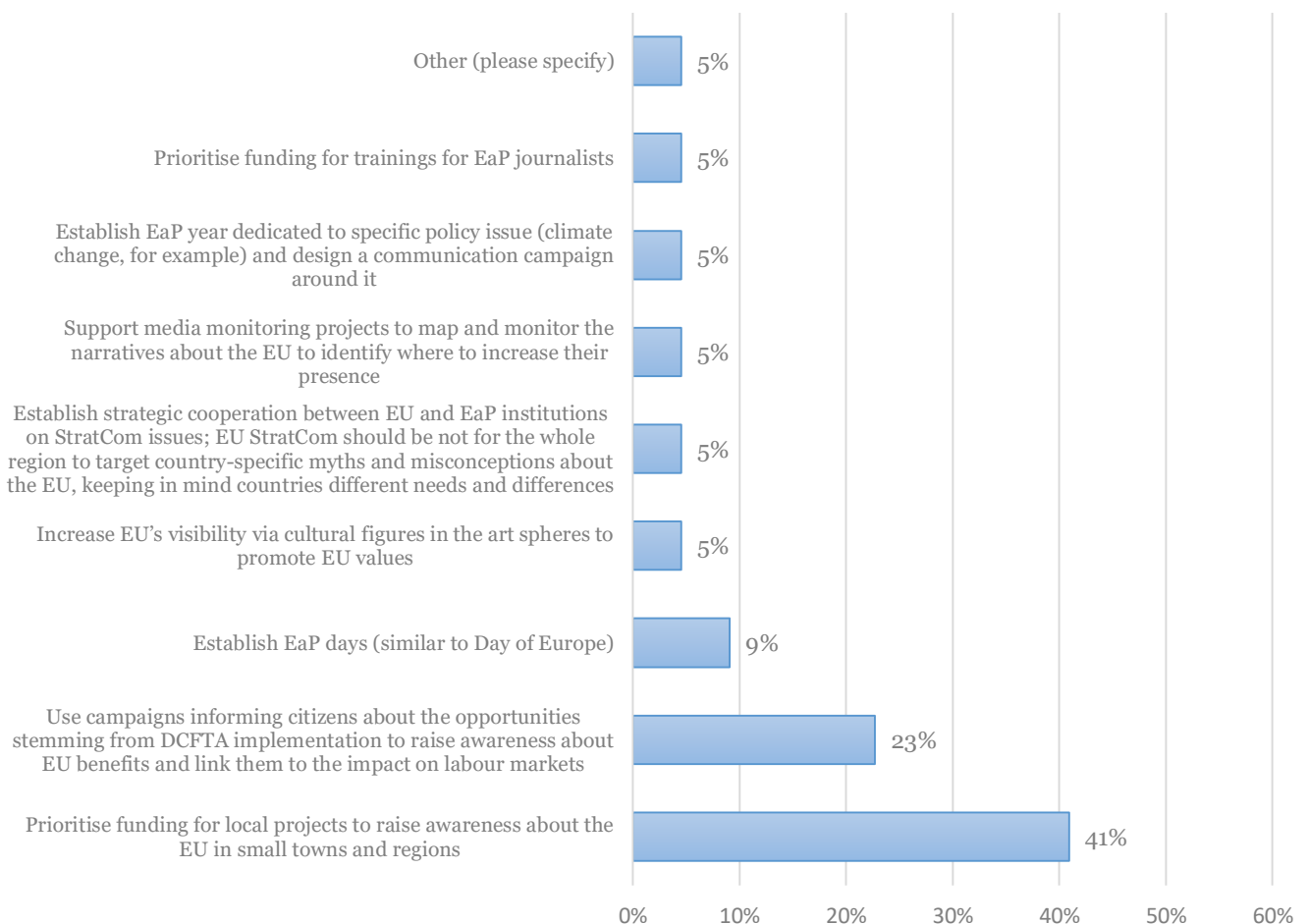
participation in the implementation of shared objectives of the EaP, taking into account the EaP's differing levels of ambition to engage with the EU.

4. BOOSTING EU VISIBILITY IN THE EAP REGION

The results of the online survey of Moldovan organisations suggest the most urgent and effective measure that the EU should support to enhance the visibility of the EU in the EaP region is **prioritising funding for local projects raising awareness about the EU in small towns and regions and going beyond EU-minded cohorts** (chosen by 41% of respondents), followed by **using campaigns informing citizens about the opportunities stemming from DCFTA implementation to raise awareness about the EU's benefits and link them to the impact on the labour market** (23%).

EU VISIBILITY IN THE EAP

In your opinion, what would be the most urgent and effective measure to enhance the visibility of the EU in the EaP region? (you can choose only one)



Recommendations

Working with media

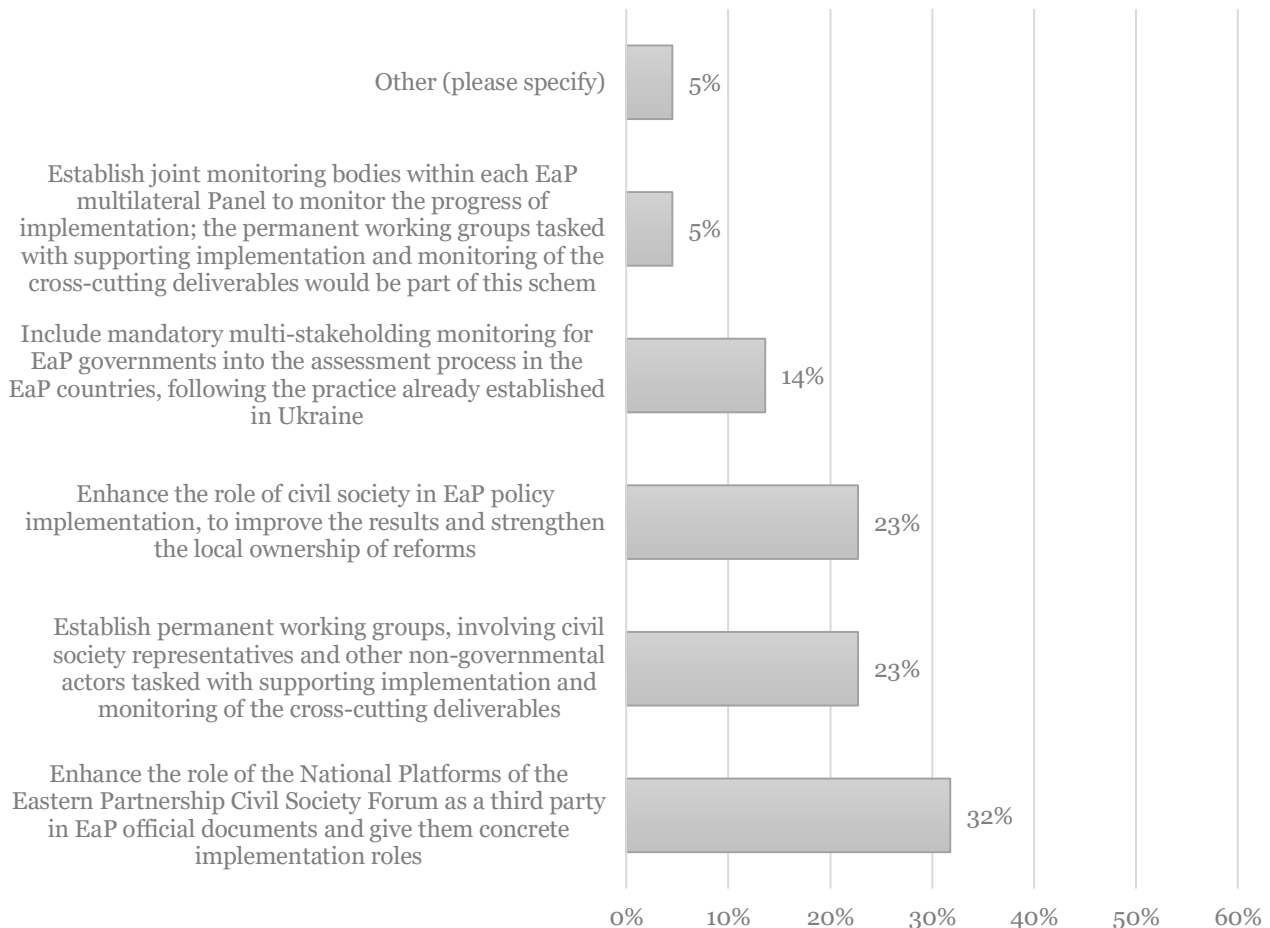
- Increase the cooperation between the EU Delegations and national and local media outlets, organising meetings on a regular basis to establish and improve connections. Seek to increase the participation of representatives of the EU Delegations in TV and radio programmes.
- Promote positive narratives about the EU via media channels in the EaP countries, through social media advertising spots.
- Increase EU presence during events and public campaigns.
- Increase EaP visibility in the EU, raising awareness and understanding about the importance and relevance of the policy within the European Union.
- Enhance EU presence in the countryside. Regional media and civil society representatives can serve as effective access tools.
- Provide an alternative to Russian TV entertainment, since TV channels are still the main source of information.
- Establish a dedicated EaP topical year (i.e. digitalisation, climate change, environment...), which would focus civil society involvement in increasing the visibility of the EU.
- Increase support to the development of CSOs' strategic communication capacities in the EaP countries.

5. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

According to the survey, 32% of the respondents believe that **the role of the National Platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum should be enhanced to the level of a third party in EaP official documents**, and that **they should be given concrete implementation roles**. In this way, civil society organisations could gradually become third actors in the process of implementing reforms in EaP countries, but would also have a stronger position and legitimacy while monitoring or drafting policy proposals or initiatives.

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In your opinion, what would be the most urgent and effective measure to increase civil society's involvement in the EaP policy?
(you can choose only one)



Recommendations:

Strengthen and improve the monitoring role of CSOs

- Create a permanent trilateral platform for dialogue, including government, civil society and the EU Delegation. Non-governmental organisations are currently not involved in the decision-making process and are inadequately supported in their objective of effectively promoting EU messages.
- Condition the disbursement of macro-financial assistance on the adoption of legislation creating an enabling environment for CSOs' and supporting freedom of speech, free access to information, and independent journalism.
- Promote and support civil society efforts to develop good governance and democratic standards, reacting promptly when the authorities plan to or take any

actions that might undermine and subsequently shrink the civic space. This should become a priority of the EU for the whole EaP region.

- Support capacity building initiatives aimed at improving local actors' skills and expertise so they are better prepared for participating in policy formulation and implementation.
- Expand the opportunities for structured engagement with civil society organisations in different areas, in formats like the one provided by the EaP CSF National Platforms.
- Support the EaP CSF National Platforms in becoming even more effective actors, able to react to or propose policy ideas to national governments or to the EU.
- Further promote CSOs' specialisation, sustainability and accountability.
- Strengthen funding for capacity development programmes for CSOs under the next financial assistance programming for the EaP countries.



ANNEX – SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum's contribution to DG NEAR's Structured Consultation is a synthesis of a comprehensive process of internal consultation of the Forum's membership base. The consultation was based on a methodology especially conceived to distill recommendations that would: (i) have a regional dimension while preserving country specificities. (ii) give a clear sense of prioritisation. (iii) be the result of a debate among civil society experts with complementary expertise on cross-sectoral areas. and (iv) ensure a high number of contributions to ensure the recommendations' legitimacy, as well as country and expertise balance.

Within the elaborated methodology, three different but complementary mechanisms were used to gather the collective input of EaP CSF member CSOs from the six EaP countries and the EU:

- *six national in-person focus groups*, to debate and formulate recommendations featuring each EaP country's national perspective on EaP and national priorities.
- *four online focus groups*, to formulate regional, thematic recommendations featuring experts with different profiles, but the same areas of specialism, from the EaP countries and the EU
- *one online survey*, intended as the most inclusive segment of the consultation, adding a quantitative element to the methodology that enabled the prioritisation of policy recommendations.

All three segments were conducted in October 2019 and involved over 200 experts.

The input from the segments was used to put together a synthesis report based on major common patterns that emerged across the focus groups and the online survey. The results of the survey and focus groups were also segmented by country and further distilled into dedicated country reports.

National in-person' focus groups

The national focus groups were designed to capture in-country perspectives and country-specific recommendations. Six focus groups were conducted in October 2019 – one in each of the EaP states – with a total of 68 participants. Each discussion lasted for about four hours and was aimed at gathering the input of a group of EaP CSF member organisations, with balanced yet diverse expertise, on a set of questions formulated around the structure of DG NEAR's Structured Consultation – i.e. four clusters of questions built around one scenario each. Each focus group followed the same protocol, built around four scenarios and containing a set of mandatory and optional questions that national FG facilitators could select from. Questions were formulated for national-level discussions to allow the aggregation of a balanced set of recommendations for the EU based on:

- Identifying current policy practices, actions and deliverables that the EU should retain in its post-2020 policy framework and ineffective or counter-productive practices which should be discontinued.
- Identifying new policy practices, actions and deliverables the EU could initiate.
- Testing policy ideas and actions already identified by the EaP CSF in previous rounds of internal consultations, or proposed as part of its existing written output (c.f. "Advancing Eastern Partnership: 23 Civil society ideas for the policy beyond 2020" policy paper).

- Identifying processes and policies that the EaP CSF should advocate further.
- Identifying umbrella recommendations as well as concrete policy actions that the EU could adopt.

Each focus group's facilitator prepared an analytical report of the discussions and submitted it to the methodology expert who used the six summary reports in the drafting of the synthesis report.

Online focus groups

Online focus groups captured thematic recommendations in a regional discussion, and were open to both EaP and EU civil society experts. Four online focus groups were conducted in October 2019. These addressed the following thematic areas:

- FG1: Economic development
- FG2: Human capital development
- FG3: Good governance, rule of law, and security
- FG4: Civil society engagement

Each focus group hosted 5-10 civil society experts – 24 in total – all of whom are active within the working groups of the EaP CSF with relevant professional background and expertise specific to the thematic area discussed. Each focus group hosted a one-hour discussion on a set of 7-9 questions, which addressed each thematic cluster from a regional perspective. Questions were formulated to allow aggregation of a set of recommendations at regional level for the EU, based on the same logic and criteria as the in-person focus groups elaborated above. Furthermore, questions sought to build upon and complement the key findings from the national focus groups with regional recommendations, as well as to triangulate the conclusions of overlapping discussions.

Four summary reports were produced as a result of the online focus groups, and used in the drafting of the final synthesis report. These included a general set of recommendations as well as one for each question asked in a summary form. When drafting the summary recommendations, the following questions were asked to guide the narrative: *What patterns emerge from the discussions? What are the common themes across the EaP region? What new policy actions could the EU pursue beyond 2020? Can these be generalised for the region based on the focus group discussions?*

Online survey

The online survey was conceived as the most inclusive segment of the consultation, adding a quantitative element to the methodology that enabled the prioritisation of policy recommendations. One general online questionnaire complemented the focus groups. The survey was offered in two languages, English and Russian, and it was made available to all six partner countries of the Eastern Partnership, as well as to EaP CSF member organisations based in EU member states. A total of 160 representatives of EaP CSF member organisations filled out the online questionnaire from 3rd to 14th October 2019.

The survey asked a mix of 15 open-ended and closed questions (+2 identification questions) grouped into six themes, following the structure of DG NEAR's Structured Consultation questionnaire:

- a. Economic development (Q1, Q2)
- b. Human capital development (Q3, Q4)
- c. Good governance, rule of law, and security (Q5, Q6, Q7)
- d. Intra-EaP cooperation (Q8, Q9)
- e. EU visibility in the EaP region (Q10, Q11)
- f. EU support to civil society (Q12, Q13, Q14)
- g. Other (Q15)

An online survey report was produced which synthesized the 160 responses of the EaP CSF member organisations into summaries of recommendations per question asked. All responses in English and Russian were individually analysed and grouped at the national level first. These were then clustered to identify regional and thematic patterns across the six EaP partner countries. The summaries of recommendations provided for each of the questions thus reflect common patterns identified across the region, and are presented in the form of recommendations for the EU.

More Information

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. For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at www.eap-csf.eu