

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - Working Group 5

Online Meeting, 18 – 19 June 2024

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Working Group 5 (WG5) held its first meeting online on 18-19 June 2024. The event, spanning five sessions, involved the introduction of delegates, statutory elections, policy country updates, formulation of the 2024-2025 Work Plan.

Introduction

The meeting began with introductory remarks from outgoing coordinator Goda Neverauskaite (EU). Delegates introduced themselves, their organisations, and countries, highlighting their unique contributions to the civil society ecosystem. The EaP CSF Secretariat provided an overview of the Forum's structure, regulatory processes, and activities, particularly focusing on the history, mission, and priorities of WG5 for the 2024/2025 cycle.

Statutory elections and results

The second session was dedicated to the organisation of statutory elections for new WG5 coordinators were held. The candidates included Elen Manaseryan (Armenia), Lana Willebrand (Sweden), Ludmila Malcoci (Moldova) and Nataliia Hryshenko (Ukraine). The candidates presented their motivations and electoral programmes and engaged in a Q&A session with delegates. The election results, announced the next morning (fourth session), showed Elen Manaseryan and Lana Willebrand as the new coordinators. <https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/BGw5O/results>

Policy Country Updates

Armenia. Elen Manaseryan, Armenian representative at the meeting, explained the priority was to develop legislation on occupational health and safety to improve working conditions. The issues of just transition, AI and digitalisation are also among the priorities.

Azerbaijan. Zaur Ibrahimli, Azerbaijan representative at the meeting, explained the priority was to obtain a raise of the minimum wage and increase employability. According to Zaur, approximating Azerbaijani laws to EU laws and standards would improve the protection of labour rights.

Belarus. Artur Finkevich, Belarus representative in the meeting, summarised the highly repressive environment under which union representatives and workers operated. Several leaders have been arrested and, at times, tortured. Young workers in strategic sectors are also prevented from reaching employment abroad.

Georgia. Raisa Liparteliani, Georgia representative at the meeting, presented several positive developments notably on health and safety regulations but stressed that more could be done to avoid fatalities and accidents. Minimum wage is too low; there is a near-full absence of unemployment benefits and protection schemes.

Moldova. Sergiu Iurcu, Moldova representative at the meeting, gave a thorough presentation of all social and labour indicators. Some positive developments (increase in birth allowance, adoption of an Occupational Health and Safety policy, social security agreements completed) and some structural challenges (low wages, increase in platform work and absence of any regulation).

Ukraine. Valerii Repin, Ukraine representative at the meeting, stressed the difficulty to gather structured data given the war. He insisted on the lack of centralised social support and the fact communities relied upon themselves therefore creating huge disparities of treatment. He called for the professionalisation of social actors



and stressed that many social jobs would be necessary to deal with the consequences of war (landmine clearing, care for war victims and returning soldiers etc.)

European Union. Goda Neverauskaite, outgoing WG5 coordinator, summarised the interventions. She reminded the support expressed by the International Labour Organisation towards Belarusian trade unionists and activists and shared the 11th Global Rights Index produced by the International trade Unions Confederation which ranks Belarus as one of the 10th worst countries for workers' rights in the world. She went on to stress that the candidate status extended to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine helped strengthen local demands in terms of social and labour policies and social dialogue. She welcomed the adoption of the Ukrainian facility Plan despite the many interrogations remaining (notably regarding the social rights of reconstruction workers).

WG5 Work Plan 2024-2025

The final session was dedicated to discussing WG priorities and developing the 2024-2025 Work Plan through two breakout discussions in Russian and English. Key issues included:

Improving legislation at national level: Delegates expressed the will to import good practices from EU legislation into their national legislative frameworks but keeping what they considered better practices from their legislative frameworks into their national legislations.

Social dialogue: Delegates particularly raised the inclusion of vulnerable groups (disabled people were expressly mentioned) into the labour market. The differences between social and civil dialogue were raised but so were their similarities, i.e. how can NGOs play a broader role in Social and Labour policies and Social Dialogue.

Promotion of social enterprises

The issues of digitalisation, artificial intelligence and just transition. This also included the questions raised by new forms of labour.

The Ukrainian recovery plan: particularly the lack of dialogue with social partners and the condition of invitation of foreign workers taking part in the recovery/rebuilding.

Conclusions

The meeting concluded with an agreement to coordinate and articulate key policy priorities across the region, preparing for the WG Work Plan, policy paper, and prepare for the next in-person meeting in Vienna (EaP CSF Civil Society Summit).

