

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 4

Online Meeting, 07-09 June 2021

Report

EaP CSF Working Group 4 met online between 7 June and 9 June 2021. Spread over six online sessions, the meeting included an introductory session reporting on policy and EaP CSF updates, a session covering thematic updates from the WG4 of the six EaP countries, four policy debates on Youth, Culture, Education and Research and Innovation and the conclusion session. Each of the session was attended by the EU stakeholders, discussing and sharing their ideas with representatives of civil society. The meeting was open to all WG4 members and delegates. In total, 68 WG4 members and delegates registered for the online sessions. Out of all registered participants 33 attended the introductory session, 37 – thematic updates, 21 – youth session, 26 attended the session on culture, 20 participants were present at the discussions on education and 19 attended the session on Research and Innovation. The closing session was attended by 25 participants of the Forum.

Introduction

Monday 7 June, 10:00-10:30 CET

[Power Point Presentation attached.](#)

Opening remarks for the introduction session, focusing on global challenges, the role of technology and the role of civil society to serve as a watchdog and authority, were delivered by WG4 coordinators Sintija Bernava and Tatiana Poshevalova.

Vera Rihackova, advocacy manager of the Secretariat of the EaP CSF updated WG4 members about the new 3-year **Re-granting to members (FSTP) and Re-granting scheme to NPs**. A new strategy for the Forum is also in development, taking into consideration recommendations and proposals on how to increase efficiency and optimise the work of the WGs.

The **New EaP CSF Academy**, to be developed on the course of the current grant of the EaP CSF, aims to strengthen the capacity of EaP CSF's members (attend training sessions, improve skills, engage with the Forum) and foster peer-to-peer learning.

The **Annual Assembly (AA)** will be held online between November 29 - December 3, 2021. Given the current sanitary situation and travel regulation being unpredictable, the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF made a decision to organise Annual Assembly online.

Updates from the Secretariat: - New Membership Manager started in April 2021 - Kristina Pitalskaia (kristina.pitalskaia@eap-csf.eu). Likewise, participants were informed that the new Communication Manager and the new EaP Index Manager will be joining the Secretariat.

The new changes in the Re-granting scheme:

- The New FSTP - EaP re-granting to members (2021-2023), EUR 240 000 per year, not allocations per working group;
- Lot 1: Monitoring EaP deliverables - to be published at the beginning of July - one selection procedure for the period of 2021 - 2023 and one multi-annual grant (for 3 years). Projects should be implemented by a cohort of members;

- Lot 2: Addressing the Forum's strategic advocacy priorities - 2 calls for 2021 and 2022 - multi-annual grant - also to be announced in July;
- Lot 3: Strengthening the linkage between the members - annual grants - focus on peer-to-peer learning and experience sharing → open only for EaP CSF members. The call is already closed and 4 projects were selected for 2021. 1 project that covers WG4 priorities - Youth Employability skills.

Call for WG4 consultant closed on 4 June. We received 16 applications in total. EaP CSF Secretariat together with WG4 coordinators will be working on the selection process.

EaP People-to-people contacts thematic policy updates

Monday, 7 June, 10:30-11:45 CET

Armenia: Diana Yeghiazaryan

The state youth strategy 2021-2025 is about to be adopted. The draft of the strategy was placed on the 19 May on the public hearing and until the 3rd of June it will be discussed with broader public. Relevant youth actors organized meetings with young people to create their comments and recommendations for the document. After the public hearing, the strategy will go to the National Assembly.

Azerbaijan: Vusala Huseynli

New results - several women's organisations were registered in the state registered. The pandemic has impacted the cultural sphere dramatically with closure of museums and other cultural offer. Some culture programmes, however, did run online, but the rest was closed. Pandemic forced the educational system to go online. People were not used to work online, but now the situation is getting better and education has better results than last year. The government let workers in education to work part-time. Research & Innovation - the pandemic let us to work in the research. The AZNP worked on 3 research papers - 1. Women's issues (women and trade), 2. Young people (how to use online resources), 3. How Azerbaijani people use new internet resources. These results were sent to the secretariat and partners.

Meetings of the AZNP:

- Meeting with the advisor of the President (Hikmet Hajiyev).
- Meeting with the GNP - discussed serious of issues, how to develop the cooperation.
- Meeting with the EU delegation in Baku.
- Meeting with the EaP CSF secretariat. These meetings let the NP to discuss multiple issues.

Belarus: Sasha Kuzmich

Belarus experienced the greatest civil engagement in the past 10 years. We are now in the middle of repressions for the civil society. There are two types of repressions: 1. "carpet bombing" – mass attacks on civil society and 2. Targeted repressions against leaders and some specific actors. Protest are not over but in a hidden stage. The international isolation is also growing due to governmental actions and response from the EU.

There has been developed a new code in education, which does not take into account the framework of the bologna process. General attitude of the government "sometimes it is not the time for laws".

WG4 in Belarus continues with individual advocacy work in the field of related expertise with BY Secretariat support. Several educational activities (art, digital literacy, R&I) took place together with diaspora events for international solidarity. Ad-hoc commission on Bologna

Process seeks to be included in the World Bank project on higher education development (monitoring and evaluation).

BNP WG4 and WG2 created a digital skills coalition and in the framework of the COVID-19 Re-granting scheme, implemented a digital months to increase awareness to the need of these skills.

Georgia: Nukri Kvelashvili

GNP held on 27-28 May 2021 the Annual Conference with input from multiple governmental stakeholders: the prime minister of Georgia, EU representatives, Ministerial representatives. WG4 held a panel on conflicts and youth.

This year, the ministry of education, science, culture and sports has been separated into two entities. Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth.

In this regard, WG4 of GNP demanded that the ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth should more listen to the young people. The group is worried that the youth component will not have sufficient attention as it had before, when the ministry had a direct connection to the prime minister's office. Our concern was not met by an understanding of the ministry.

Goals of WG4:

- Effective use of existing cooperation mechanisms
- Structural dialogue with Executive and Legislative

Planned activities

- Annual General Meeting (14 June 2021)
- Thematic WG/subgroup meetings
- Second high-level conference with the GoG
- Sectoral meetings with relevant institutions
- Increasing regional involvement
- Annual General Meeting - new NP coordinator and coordinator for WGs

Activities implemented in 2020

- Thematic working group/subgroup meetings, discussed up to 20 issues, which are reflected in the protocols
- Meetings of the Subgroups
- Sectorial meetings
- Issued and disseminated special statements/appeals
- Address to the Prime Minister of Georgia and the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia on the merging the Youth Agency with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia was shared at the international level.

Moldova: Vitalie Cirhana

Lockdown affected the work - but people adapted. Educational sector was not ready to switch online. Not all pupils had physical access to digital devices. Our ministry sought help from international actors to raise the capacity of teachers and provide support with digital devices to students.

The national youth strategy was finished in 2020 and now there is an attempt to organise an evaluation of this strategy. We are still waiting for the creation of an agency for youth. It was expected in September 2020. This is related to the political crisis in Moldova. We hope to have this established after the elections.

WG4 activities: Online training for teachers to use digital tools - to develop their capacity to interact with students & Activities in youth sector. MNP WG4 is at the initial phase to initiate the Youth Dialogue with National Youth Council.

Ukraine: Ivan Kulchytskyy

Ukraine and UNP actively support Belarus and our Belarusian colleague, who settled in Ukraine now. You can view our statements on Belarus on our web-page: <http://eap-csf.org.ua/>.

The new law on youth, limiting the age of youth until 29. Before was until 35. This age is considered now only in the context of young families and their needs for accommodation. Additional law suggest the creation of youth councils, which should align the Ukraine youth laws to the EU youth policy. As per president's decree, the new strategy to youth was adopted.

In the educational sphere, the situation is similar to other countries. However, now, the united Ukrainian online school has been developed for 5-11th grades. There is also a strategy for professional-technical education and STEM. At the same time, the system of professional orientation does not work well. More than 80% graduates are planning to study at the university, which deforms the market needs. We need more development of digital services. We discuss now a draft concept for digitalisation of education and research in Ukraine. We also need to ensure an active and balanced participation of students. Increase international ratings of universities and improve dual education system.

There's a paradigm change in the society in terms of understanding culture as one of the crucial elements of the national development of the state. Plans for digitalisation of culture has already been developed. four large scale project on heritage, arts, tourism and books are in planning. However, we need to ensure proper funding for cultural institutions by local authorities, more harmonisation in digitalisation of cultural sphere and improve the work of Ukrainian cultural foundation.

In Research and Innovation, there is almost no increase of funding. A low level of coordination between the institutions and very slow pace of reforms in the Academy of science. In addition, the process of applying for grants through national institutions is complicated. The number of young people in R&I sphere is decreasing. We need to develop a better integration with European Research institutions. There needs to be more connection between Research, culture and business, particularly in the context of SMART specialisation. We need to support youth entrepreneurship. In order to achieve this all we need to improve our legal basis.

Update from the stakeholders:

Marta Wytrykowska, EEAS

The preparation of the EaP Summit - to be held on 15/16 December (dates to be confirmed). The summit is seen as preparatory process for the new EaP policy. In 2019 we held structured consultations, where also EaP CSF provided input. The 2020 marked the adoption of a joint communication in March and leaders' video conference in June. Currently, we are preparing a new EaP document, which will operationalise the joint communication bringing it to the next level and prepare concrete targets. We hope this agenda will be endorsed at the Summit.

Joint staff working document should be ready in the coming weeks. It is built on the achievements, results of the structured consultations, various contributions etc. The agenda is built on media freedom, justice, fight with corruption, security cooperation, green transformation, digital, modernisation of economies- making it more innovative, promotion of gender equality, strong emphasis on recovery. All these objectives will be the basis of the recovery, resilience and reforms in the region.

Civil society will constitute the key aspect of the future agenda - to stimulate the growth of employability, mobility. EU4Youth programme, Erasmus+, Smart specialisation - these aspects are included in the future EaP agenda.

Jeroen Willems, DG NEAR

Joint Staff working document will have 2 pillars: 1) governance - rule of law & strong institutions, security & inclusive society; 2) Investment pillar focusing on the connectivity, green, digital, accompanied by an economic and investment plan. This will allow us to make best use of the EU instruments.

The new agenda will be comprehensive, covering all the areas, but also with a focus on specific targets that need more attention. Focus on youth remains a big priority. We are proposing a new deal for youth throughout both pillars, which will:

1. Strengthen the youth engagement in policymaking
2. Supporting young entrepreneurs

There will be three types of activities under the new deal for youth:

1. Youth Dialogue: We would like to have a more structured Youth Dialogue, including interregional networks in the EaP. Youth Dialogue will be involved in the development of the new youth strategy.
2. Youth Employment partnership, focusing on the transition of youth from education to the working market and addressing the mismatch between the skills and the market needs. The aim is to modernise the education system, the greening and digitalisation of work.
3. Youth Social Entrepreneurship, creating right environment for youth to set up new innovative businesses, which can help create new jobs and foster inclusion.

Policy Debate on Youth

Monday, 7 June, 14:00 - 15:30 CET

[*Power Point Presentation attached.*](#)

Jochen Schmidt, International Aid / Cooperation Officer for Youth and Education, DG NEAR, focused his presentation on EU actions in empowering young people in the EaP region. EU4Youth Programme fosters the active participation of young people in societies, by improving their employability and by developing youth leadership. In his introductory remarks, he mentioned that youth and education is one of the key deliverables to EaP. He presented the [EU4Youth Achievement report for 2020](#), which provides nine recommendations for future projects based on 2020 results.

In the new phase of the EaP policy, DG NEAR will focus on the new deal for youth, focused on two pillars: Economic dimension (employability, bridging education to the standards of the labour market, supporting employability and skills development, and youth entrepreneurship), and Youth participation and leadership dimension (focused on Erasmus+ formal and non-formal education opportunities, European Solidarity Corps, EaP Youth Forum event and more structured youth policy dialogue). However, in the new phase more work will be dedicated to validation of non-formal education and how to link it to the Youth Pass. The focus will also go more into entrepreneurial education. Engaging youth more systematically and developing the Youth Dialogue is another area of priority.

Erasmus + programme and European Solidarity Corps will remain on top of the bilateral support (reforms towards quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning).

Two main initiatives:

- EU4Youth Alumni Network – is built as a result of the recommendations of several Youth Fora. EaP Youth forum suggested the creation of this networking platform to keep alumni of EU mobility programmes and youth initiatives together. 60 alumni are currently running 40 initiatives at the local level to engage young people from region and be more inclusive project.
- Young European Ambassadors (YEAs) → 450 YEAs connecting active young people in the EaP countries to foster youth cooperation in their local communities.

New Deal for Youth:

New Deal for Youth will have an economic dimension (labour market, employability, skill development, youth entrepreneurship (esp. Social entrepreneurship), active labour market), and youth participation and leadership dimension (Erasmus+, formal and non-formal education, Solidarity Corps, EaP Youth Forum and more structured youth policy dialogue).

Key initiatives: EaP Youth Dialogue, Youth employment partnerships, Youth social entrepreneurship. The aim is to link these initiatives to the new architecture of EaP - to see how the voice of youth can be better channelled in Platforms and Panels, how to better represent youth during these meetings.

Discussion:

During the Questions & Answers session, the question regarding the cooperation between EU4Youth Alumni Network and other projects such as Erasmus Student Network (ESN) or YEAs was asked. Mr Schmidt answered that EU4Youth has an ongoing process to understand the capacity and experience of YEAs to be integrated into the EU4Youth Alumni Network and a similar discussion should take place with ESB as well. Being asked about how the cross-cutting participation of Youth organisations in multiple areas can be achieved, Jochen Schmidt answered that there is no need to create an independent working group on youth, but rather create synergies and strengthen the relationship between youth and civil society organisations. Youth voice can be shared through already existing structures - the question remains how to engage young people to participate.

Next, participants did a SWOT analysis on the current situation regarding youth in all 6 EaP countries. The analysis was structured by assessing Threats, exploiting Opportunities, strengthening Weaknesses, and basing important activities on Strengths. One priority discussed by the participants was **Youth skills, especially entrepreneurial skills**. Participants mentioned that EaP curricula do not focus on skills development and teachers are not prepared to teach entrepreneurial skills.

Next, the aspect of **Youth mobility** was discussed because many EaP countries, especially Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, face challenges related to mobility. Moreover, participants mentioned that WG4 does not have its own mobility activities to strengthen the connection between civil society and youth organisations in the region. The last aspect discussed was **strengthening the voice of youth in EaP Youth Dialogue**. There are many opportunities for young people to actively participate that are not utilised.

Policy Debate on Culture

Tuesday, 8 June, 10:00 - 11:30 CET

Corinne Deleu, DG NEAR gave a brief overview of the current developments in the field of culture. **EU4Culture** – a new regional program envisaged for 4 years. The project is directed to non-capital cities, reaching to local areas in the EaP region. At this stage the project is being introduced to corresponding ministries for them to get acquainted with it. In five out of six EaP countries, the first calls for proposals have been already launched. In Belarus, there will be a different program together with EU delegation, focusing on the civil society.

A new launch of Mobility scheme is planned for September. A big event is planned for November.

Problems, threats, opportunities in the cultural sector in the EaP (identified by the civil society representatives).

Threats:

- The sphere of culture is one of the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- More than 80% of UNESCO World heritage sites have closed down, threatening the livelihoods of the local communities and professionals. Global tourism brought to a standstill;
- Cultural facilities are losing millions in revenue;
- Creative institutions and artists lost their income, and some lost their lives in the COVID-19;
- The cancellation of so many international projects increased the isolation of artists;
- Worsened freedom of expression of cultural figures in non-democratic countries

Opportunities:

- Culture brings people together, keeps them connected and shortens the distance between them;
- Growing interest in art, history and culture, in local historical tourism and heritage;
- The demand for virtual access to museums, heritage sites, concerts, theatre performances have reached the unprecedented level;
- Opportunities of moving culture online and supporting the production of cultural services and products offered by online platforms;
- Tourism and culture sectors are facing an opportunity to create new partnerships and collaborations.

Discussion:

Some participants shared successful examples of cultural activities being moved online. For example, the Goethe institute in Ukraine organised virtual tours to Czech Republic, Austria, and Germany. However, although there are many digital initiatives within the framework of creative Europe, the EaP countries are lacking **tools for standardising the digitalisation of culture**. At the same time, many people are lacking digital skills and competencies in order to make use of cultural activities in a digital environment. Another issue faced by EaP countries is the construction of highways or hydroelectric power plants near cultural heritage sites or landscape areas. At the same time, many cultural sites and heritage sites are suffering from conflicts, especially in the conflict regions in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Moreover, cultural figures have been one of the main targets of the Belarusian repression during the last year. A lot of them are relocated from the country, but many of them are imprisoned or even have been killed. This is why in Belarus, culture suffered not only from COVID-19, but also from the political crisis. Civil society organisations are trying to help them find new jobs, but they need to continue their work in music, theatre or another field. WG4 can voice these issues and propose recommendations together with mechanisms that EU bodies can use during platform and panel meetings. At the same time, WG4 can create

advocacy campaigns and appeal to EU bodies or actors by preparing policy papers and discussing it with EU stakeholders.

Policy Debate on Education

Tuesday, 8 June, 12:00 - 13:30 CET

Corinne Deleu, DG NEAR gave a brief overview of the current developments in the field of education. In education, there is no regional programme such as EU4Youth or EU4Culture. A commission study on the impact of COVID-19 on education covered mostly primary and secondary education. The researchers had interviews with ministries of education, teachers from the EaP region and other stakeholders. Now the study is in the final stage of having online consultations with schools from EaP. The results will be shared once publicly available.

In late June, DG NEAR will have a workshop about the first findings of the paper. Based on that, there is a plan to develop a regional project on education. The biggest challenge is that all countries face individual challenges. To create such a project, there is a need to look at the common challenges and also create a platform to share the best practices of the EaP countries. But also, it is important to understand how to involve civil society in education policy, involving parents. We talk a lot about informal education and extracurricular education, skills that kids can get, but also helping kids to get digital skills.

Problems, threats, opportunities in the educational sector in the EaP (identified by the civil society representatives).

Threats:

- Accessibility to education and modern technologies especially in remote areas and among people from vulnerable groups is limited
- Political Pressure on the academic community in Belarus and Azerbaijan and difficulties to conduct projects via CSOs
- Rising digital divide, especially in rural areas
- Low quality of education, incl. student activity
- There is no modern vocational education (VET)

Opportunities:

- Trainings and activities to improve media literacy and digital skills among educators not only among pupils/ students
- Integration of different digital platforms and tools and NFE into education
- Development of digital education, leap in technology diffusion
- A new vision for blended learning
- Recognition of non-formal education and system creation

Discussion:

The discussion on Education focused on the impact of COVID-19 on education. The transition to **online education badly affected the education quality**, although teachers did their best. While university students adapted quickly to online learning, pupils from primary and secondary schools have found it difficult to study digitally. Moreover, teachers faced challenges in making use of digital tools, adapting new forms of teaching in a digital format, likewise, in engaging and interacting with students. Online schooling is a great challenge for many **families who do not have access to digital devices** (computer, access to internet) or even insufficient space in families' apartments.

Some civil society organisations in the EaP region monitored the situation of education and attracted attention to ministries regarding the issue. For example, some students need to pay for the internet connection both on campus and at their homes. The government should collaborate with private internet providers to ensure free internet access at least on university campuses and student dormitories. Moreover, many educational institutions did not make use of other digital resources to facilitate online exams, registrations. Online education requires a more complex approach on digital education that goes beyond utilising platforms such as Zoom or Messenger apps. We need to see blended learning as the future of education and we need to be more prepared for it.

Moreover, the aspect of **informal education** was discussed, especially adult education and life-long learning. Adults, vulnerable groups were not equipped well prior to the pandemic, therefore, it was hard for them to study digitally. Another aspect discussed was the **inclusion of students and pupils with disabilities in online education**. They need people-to-people contact which was affected by the pandemic. In this situation, civil society can make a difference by integrating students at the local / community level - civil society, parents, youth clubs can help. Furthermore, including **peace-building education** in the curriculum was also discussed. Currently, peace-building education is touched upon in lessons related to (EU) values, ethics, philosophy or civics.

Policy Debate on Research and Innovation

Wednesday, 9 June, 10:00 - 11:30 CET

Power Point Presentation attached [here](#) and [here](#).

Silvia Bojinova, DG Research and Innovation

Europe faces societal, ecological and economic challenges, aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. In this regard, the R&I are best placed to:

- Accelerate the green and digital transitions;
- Strengthen resilience and crisis preparedness;
- Support Europe's global competitiveness;

$\frac{2}{3}$ of EU productivity growth over the last decades has been driven by R&I investments. Investments in R&I ensure a sustainable future, economic resilience, growth and competitiveness. Horizon 2020 entered in force on 12 May, and several calls have already been published. Applicants from EaP are welcome to submit their applications.

On the course of the past 10 years after starting the cooperation between the EU and EaP, we have:

- Formulated concrete deliverables on R&I
- We created an EaP Platform 4 and EaP Panel on R&I with an active participation of all countries, including newly launched informal meetings of Panel on R&I.
- March 2020 - Joint Communication on the "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 - Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all" - The development of a common knowledge and innovation space between the EU and the partner countries should be fostered, using scientific evidence to create knowledge-based jobs and attract investors to innovate businesses in the EU and the neighbourhood.
- Joint Staff Working Document "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities" is under adoption.

Achievements:

- Research & Innovation stakeholders in the four Horizon 2020 associated countries (Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova and Georgia) are integrated in EU R&I networks and platforms. The participants had the opportunity to be observers during panel discussions but also contribute with insights.
- All partner countries had full access to all Horizon 2020 funding schemes. In 2017-2020, partner countries achieve an average success rate of 10.8% for proposals in calls, which is below the average rate of 12%. EaP entities have participated in more than 220 Horizon 2020 projects, receiving close to 50 million EUR of direct contributions. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme benefited more than 400 researchers from the partner countries.
- National Research and Education networks in all partner countries are integrated in the pan-European GEANT network. Over 800 000 users from more than 400 research and higher education institutions across the region benefit from network connectivity at an average price reduction of 70% and a ten-fold capacity increase.
- Five of the six partner countries expressed interest in smart specialisation.

New Deliverables for R&I: (This proposal has to be voted on during the EaP Summit in 2021. New deliverables for EaP will define the cooperation for next years.)

- Increase each partner country's **Global Innovation Index Score** by 3 points, through (i) **investing in R&I** policy reforms; (ii) **increase gross expenditure in R&I** by at least 50% to ensure sustainable growth and (iii) **to support the green and digital transformation.**
- Ensure **solid citizen engagement** in R&I actions, including in areas affecting the future of economies and societies.
- Strengthen excellence and the technological base **by increasing to 700** the number of EaP Partner countries participations in Horizon Europe;
- Support the implementation of smart specialisation strategies and the development of technology transfer roadmaps by interested EaP Partners.

How can civil society support the future cooperation?

- Lobby national EaP governments in order to increase the investing in R&I policy reforms;
- Lobby national EaP governments to increase gross expenditure in R&I by at least 50%;
- Ensure solid citizen engagement in R&I actions, including in areas affecting the future economies and societies;
- Support in monitoring the implementation of PSF recommendations;
- Participation of the CSF representatives in the EaP Panel on R&I.

Discussion:

One concern raised was that **EaP is somewhat less targeted by Horizon Europe calls** than other regions such as Western Balkans. Silvia Bojinova mentioned that Horizons Europe does not provide special tools for specific areas, but it uses 'widening measures' to bridge the gap of participation between Western and Eastern European countries. Similarly, Horizons Europe provides a **summer camp training programme for individual researchers** to learn how to create project proposals and also find potential partners to create consortia. Horizons Europe also creates **info days for EaP countries**, therefore, EaP countries are advised to participate in such project in order to increase their competitiveness within the Horizons Europe programme.

Next, it was discussed that **young people are not motivated to embrace a career in research**, science or innovation because these areas are not well-funded in the region. While in most EU countries the number of researchers is increasing, in the EaP region there is a negative tendency. **The funds in EaP dedicated to research are limited** which increases the gap between EaP and EU countries. Furthermore, in the EU there are tools of popularising science, which do not exist in EaP countries. There are some competitions, camps, events, but in the EaP region the importance of R&I is not raised for children at a very young age. At the same time, **EaP countries lack modern technology and laboratories** to attract young people.

Moreover, civil society should acknowledge the importance of research in society. **Civil society can be drivers for innovation** and even can contribute to the research process by taking some measures, collecting data. Finally, **the entry fee for Horizons Europe** was discussed, which is rather high for EaP countries. This is why, DG NEAR supports EaP countries with 50% reimbursement of the entry ticket for the next 3 years. However, some members are concerned about EaP governments' willingness to pay the whole entry fee afterwards.

Conclusions and following steps

Wednesday, 9 June, 12:00 - 13:00 CET

EaP CSF recommendations in the field of youth:

Youth mobility:

- Advocacy for more Mobility activities for young people within the Erasmus+ Programme, since currently EaP has fewer opportunities. Each year Erasmus+ is getting less and less inclusive by offering fewer and fewer mobility opportunities for the EaP region (Source: [Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2021](#).) The Erasmus+ Programme closed its KA2 youth window for the EaP countries, where the youth organisations could directly apply. Now EaP countries can be involved as partners, only if a solid justification is provided. The KA3 and KA1 are also much restrictive for the countries of this region. The WG4 wants to advocate and participate more actively in increasing mobility opportunities in the Erasmus+ programme.

Youth skills:

- Youth skills should be reframed as “Youth Competencies”
- This priority area should be seen much in connection with Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship

Create a separate WG for Youth

- Create a working group for drafting proposal and changes connected to the establishment of Youth WG - in consultations between National youth councils, European Youth Forum and responsible stakeholders from Secretariat of EaP CSF and other relevant stakeholders - the draft of the proposal should be presented at the next General Assembly;
- Establish clear criteria of membership of Youth WG (for example member-based (66% of members - youth), youth-led (youth can elect and be elected), National youth council from each EaP country recognized by European Youth Forum);
- Jointly set policy goals for EaP region in strong relation to European Youth Goals to bring closer agenda of European youth and youth from EaP region;

- Provide financial support for the implementation of youth projects (as part of the New Deal for youth)

Youth entrepreneurship:

- Recommendation to national governments to create an entrepreneurship training programs for young people with the aim to improve the entrepreneurship education system, pay attention to entrepreneurship / employability as a way to adapt to the changing labor market

Youth employability:

- Open Youth employment initiative for EaP countries, ensure the equal participation mechanism.
- Connect employability issue with competencies and entrepreneurship (complex problem-solving approach).
- Belarus: ensure free participation in the labour market (strong recommendation to Belarusian government to cancel the “work distribution” for graduates)

EaP CSF recommendations in the field of culture:

Culture brings people together keeping us connected. Culture provides comfort, inspiration and hope at a time of enormous anxiety and uncertainty. The sphere of culture is one of the most affected not only by the Covid-19 pandemic but also from political and military conflicts. While people around the world turn to culture as a source of comfort and connection, more than 80% of UNESCO World Heritage properties have closed down, threatening the livelihoods of the local communities and cultural professionals. Cultural institutions and facilities including museums, theatres and cinemas and many have had to let go of their staff. Creative institutions and artists most of whom were already working part-time on an informal basis or under precarious contracts prior to the pandemic are struggling to make ends meet. Some have managed through creative and innovative ways taking advantage of opportunities the current situation presents.

Recommendations:

- **Capacity building** is crucial to help reinvent and diversify the offers of cultural industries, attract new audiences, develop new skills and adjust to the world’s transition to the new conditions. It is important to invest and draw on culture as a vector of resilience and socio-economic and human development, within the framework of government policies and international cooperation.
We welcome the launch of the program, while noting the need to expand access to capacity building throughout the EaP territory, not just individual cities.
- **Social protection programs.** Cultural and creative sectors are important in their own right in terms of their economic impact and employment. Pandemic has sharply exposed the structural fragility. Many individuals across the cultural sector temporarily or permanently lost their contracts or employment, thus financial stimulus and social protection programs should be extended for artists and those working in field of culture. *It is important to include cultural figures among the groups vulnerable to the pandemic, pay attention to them when analyzing the situation and when formulating recovery measures.*
- **Improvements in information and data exchange between sectors** are needed. As well there is need for more researches and discussions on the role of culture in the transformation of societies of EaP countries and its response to the Covid19 challenges; cultural heritage and local development in the period after the lockdown; social and economic rights of artists in and after the pandemic; copyright issues in the era of mass digitization of cultural content and freedom of expression.

Analyzing and monitoring the situation in the field of culture is becoming very important, including the support of civil society in monitoring the implementation of their countries' international obligations (including international conventions).

- **Investments in modern technologies and people digital competences, overcoming digital divide.** Demand for virtual access to museums, heritage sites, theatres and performances has reached unprecedented levels moving culture online and supporting the production of cultural services and products offered by online platforms. Digital transformation is not only about investments in modern technologies, it is also about investments in digital competences for people working in cultural and creative sectors, **and their audiences.**

We suggest taking this into account when formulating priorities.

- **Cross sectoral governance and international cooperation.** Pandemic is an outstanding opportunity to build cross-sectoral governance models between culture key players. These models should involve tech partners to build platforms and exchange forums to coordinate actions and share information and good practices.

The development of digital art is becoming important, including from the point of view of monetization and the development of entrepreneurship in the field of culture. Also during the recovery from the pandemic, we suggest to support the revival and development of art and creative residences programs, also within and between EaP countries. It is becoming very important to support residences and projects of solidarity for Belarusian cultural workers, who today are forced to flee from mass repressions.

- **New partnerships promoting sustainability.** Tourism and culture sectors must work together creating new partnerships and collaborations promoting more sustainable cultural tourism. Marketing strategies in tourism should highlight local cultural expressions not only to address new audiences, but also to inspire responsible travel. During this digital transition, tourism and culture can forge alliances with tech companies, the private sector and non governmental organizations to improve access to capacity building programs on culture available offline and online.

- **Protection of cultural heritage in times of conflicts (armed conflicts and war).** Cultural heritage is both a cultural expression of individuals and communities and an essential part of their identity and everyday life. Conflicts pose a great threat not only to the inhabitants, but also to the cultural heritage. Protecting and promoting cultural heritage requires the engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders that have to negotiate their respective involvement. Participatory approaches and community-based methods are essential elements for successful cross sectoral interventions in cultural heritage protection and enhancement.

We propose to pay special attention to the ideas and practices proposed by the CoE Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) and its implementation in the EaP countries.

- **Cultural diplomacy.** Culture and creative industries are part of each country's identity and play a crucial role building peace, protecting cultural heritage, promoting dialogue between the people and countries.

In a situation of mass repressions, the Belarusian civil society came up with an initiative to hold a global Belarusian Culture Week on July 5-11, 2021. Such events - Weeks or Days of Cultures of the EaP countries - could become good annual actions of cultural diplomacy, to draw attention to problems, resolve crises, establish mutual understanding between our societies.

EaP CSF Recommendations in the field of education:

- Offering support programs providing digital devices to students/ pupils/ educators in remote communities

- Trainings/camps to educators/students to improve their digital skills and competences
- Promote the provision of the Internet
- Creation of conditions for the development of social competences, which sagged during the pandemic
- Train the trainers to adapt to distance learning

EaP CSF recommendations in the field of Research and Innovation:

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world significantly, with its impact felt across economies, sectors, and industries. Research and academia have been affected too. University education has gone online, and researchers from many disciplines are now tackling COVID-19-pertinent issues, allowing a wide range of innovative ideas to emerge on how a post-pandemic world may look. For these innovative ideas to have an impact, research results need to find their way to policymakers, businesses, and the public. Innovation is increasingly essential for an effective response to and recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic. It is clear that the urgency of the crisis has been a catalyst for creative and novel approaches, driving decision makers to act fast and decisively. At the same time, urgency can mean that policy makers choose to take decisions without sufficient consultation with relevant stakeholders. There is also considerable uncertainty surrounding the virus and its impacts, how it spreads, how best to prevent and treat it, and how to mitigate the wider impacts.

- Health-focused innovations are only the most visible forms of innovation that have taken place, and are often easier to define and quantify in financial terms. There have been many innovations to deal with the indirect or secondary impacts of the pandemic. These include the wide range of public policy measures taken to aid hard-hit businesses and vulnerable households; grassroots innovations led by citizens and communities to provide mutual aid and strengthen social solidarity.
- For many development actors on the ground, the need for creative approaches was clearly apparent from the outset of the pandemic. There have been ongoing challenges around mobility of staff, communications, partner engagement, access and delivery of services, which have continued to affect the response. This has created a rich environment for many donors and partners to adapt and adopt new approaches, form partnerships with new actors, and test new approaches.
- Collaboration in innovation investments and associated learning processes must be improved. There is a need for more upfront collaboration and co-ordination to ensure that innovation investments are coherent. Ensuring and sustaining a focus on the poorest and leaving no one behind. This means developing appropriate frameworks and processes to ensure that innovation efforts and outputs are as inclusive as possible. This might involve determining needs at local and national levels, analysing how well the current innovations is meeting these needs, and using these findings to determine innovation priorities.
- An overview of the opportunities for civil society organizations to participate in the Horizon Europe program needs to be prepared, conduct special information services for civil society organizations to explain the peculiarities of the preparation of project proposals for Horizon Europe competitions.
- Promote the participation of civil society organizations in R&D activities, in particular in areas that affect the future of economies and societies.
- Lobby national EaP governments in order to increase the investing in R&I policy reforms;
- Lobby national EaP governments to increase gross expenditure in R&I by at least 50%;
- Investing in more strategic and focused collaboration, especially with local and national actors. Interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration and innovation are important to save the lives of those most badly affected.