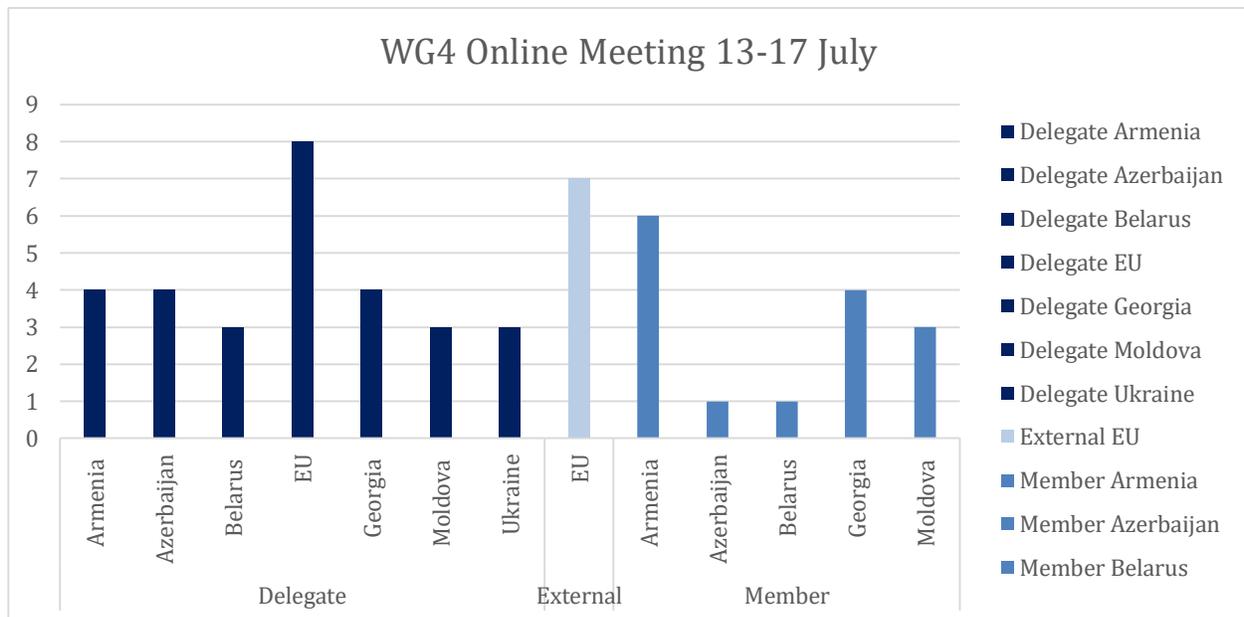


Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 4

Online Meeting, 13-17 July 2020

Meeting Report

This year, EaP CSF Working Group 4 met for their meetings online due to the current pandemic. The Working Group 4 meetings took place during the week of 13 to 17 July. First, two meet & greet sessions were held, followed by four sub-group discussions on youth and mobility, offline an online education, promotion of culture and research and skills. The last session gave participants the opportunity to engage in a meeting with EU stakeholders. Out of 51 attendees, 29 were current delegates, 15 members and 7 external guests. The chart below shows the distribution of these attendees between the 6 EaP countries and EU member states.



Meet & Greet sessions

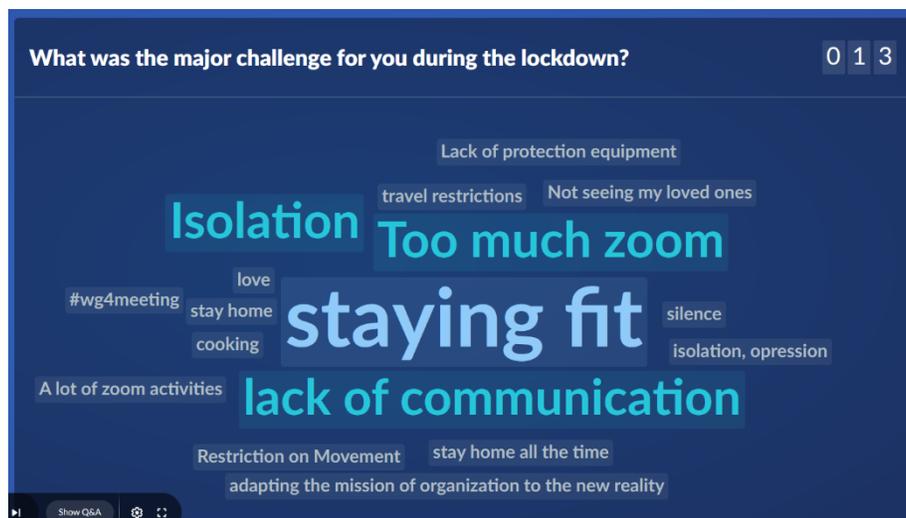
Monday 13 July, 14:00-15:30 CET | Tuesday 14 July 10:00-11:30 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).



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The Meet and Greet sessions started with opening remarks from WG4 Coordinators Zaur Akbar and video address by Sintija Bernava. The icebreaker exercise conducted via Sli.do tool revealed the major challenges and opportunities for the WG4 members and delegates during the pandemic.



Following, the Secretariat of the EaP CSF introduced the structure of the Forum and updated the participants on the activities of the Forum. The gender mainstreaming strategy is currently being developed and is planned to be presented to delegates for adoption next year. Moreover, the Secretariat explained the procedure of extension of the Steering Committee mandate due to the current situation with the pandemic. Other key updates concerned the current



#PrepareEaP4Health campaign and membership activities (membership database and the membership newsletter). The Secretariat also presented the latest re-granting 2020 results. The official EaP architecture events are currently on hold, yet platform and panel meetings should resume fully online starting from the fall 2020.

In regard to the future of the EaP policy, youth is given a priority and considered to be a cross-cutting deliverable. Related to this, the concept of the upcoming Youth Conference – Youth4Environment was presented to delegates. The call for participation will be launched shortly. More information about the conference can be viewed [here](#).

In addition, since the pandemic has caused the need for restructuring the budget of EaP CSF project, some part of it are foreseen now for the COVID-19 related policy papers to which members and delegates of each Working Groups have contributed with topics.

Sub-group discussion 1: youth and mobility

Tuesday 14 July, 12:00-14:00 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).

During the youth and mobility sub-group discussion, Giorgi Kakulia, Programme Coordinator for EU4Youth, presented the EU4Youth programme, which advocates for the active participation of young people in society and tries to enhance employability by developing skills like leadership and entrepreneurship.

The programme is constituted from three components. First, capacity building projects which support youth organisations or young leaders to become active in policy making or entrepreneurship. Second, a grant scheme which focuses on disadvantaged youth and youth entrepreneurship. Lastly, a coordination component which tries to ensure the good development of the project.

Following, Guenadi Sobal, project assistant and events coordinator at GOPA, presented the Youth Engagement Roadmaps – and among them a newly established Youth Dialogue. This project is part of EU4Youth and consists of three main elements. On the one hand, thematic reviews of policies in the partner countries with the intent to provide expert recommendations and design youth policies. On the other hand, youth dialogue and employment partnerships. This enhances youth participation in decision-making and addresses the needs of young people, such as education and work placements. Finally, youth policy labs which serve as platforms for exchange of relevant knowledge and ideas, called policy labs. More information [here](#).

After the guest input, participants discussed challenges related to youth and mobility in their respective countries. The pandemic has restricted the work of many civil society organisations in



the EaP. Many youth groups have had to cease or reduce their activities, either working online or adapting activities to support vulnerable people. Next to the impact of the pandemic, the continuation of Erasmus+ in EaP countries, especially in the regions and rural areas is one of the issues that was discussed. Another challenge is the youth participation in local decision-making processes. Moreover, participants highlighted that online education should be facilitated and digital literacy enhanced.

Sub-group discussion 2: offline and online education

Wednesday 15 July, 10:00-12:00 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).

During the sub-group discussion on online and offline education, participants have presented the situation on distance learning in each country. Common problems arisen from the discussions include shortage of devices for both teachers and students. Lack of equipment and internet access concerns especially large families and rural areas. Private companies have tried to fill this by providing materials, internet connection and training to targeted groups, revealing a high interest for people to improve their skills. In terms of student mobility, although a hybrid format of Erasmus+ project has been proposed for next year, civil society expressed dissatisfaction in this modality as it would not provide the same benefits as the traditional one. In the second part of the meeting, participants have been invited into different virtual break-out rooms to develop possible solutions and prepare civil society recommendations. From these discussions, the following priorities have emerged for the next WG4 projects: advocating for and ensuring quality education for vulnerable groups through the use of innovative digital tools, ensuring the availability of psychological support, reorganisation of EU programmes on youth mobility, develop digital civic engagement of young people as digital citizenship in the EaP, etc.

Policy recommendations formulated by participants can be found [here](#).

Sub-group discussion 3: promotion of culture

Wednesday 15 July 2020, 14h00-16h00 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disastrous impact on the cultural sector. Events were cancelled or postponed, people working in the field lost their incomes or jobs. The problem is further



exacerbated by the lack of reserves and reduced fundraising capacities of theatre groups, galleries and artists. Also, the potential audience is reduced given the restrictions of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, some opportunities for medium- and long-term development of the culture sector were proposed. For instance, an online platform where artists, photographers or painters can sell their work would be an interesting project. Another option would be an online platform where artists put content online and people can pay to view the content. Participants also touched on the possibility of cooperation between the cultural and the IT sectors to improve branding and websites. Also, the exchange of best practices on adapting business models, management and sales to the current situation could help mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Sub-group discussion 4: research and skills

Thursday 16 July 2020, 10h00-12h00 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).

The sub-group discussion on research and skills started with a round of country updates and continued with the presentation of the state of play of each country. Although the digitalisation process has started, much is still to be done in terms of skills development in the EaP region. As for the Research sector, some EaP countries still have the former Soviet hierarchy, at the top of which there is the “Academy of Science”, which controls other research institutes; therefore, research is still not free, especially in the social and political science sector. Researchers are also often working *pro bono*, and for this reason there is a shortage of workers in the research sectors.

Research centres on COVID-19 funded by the United States have been objects of fake news by Russian propaganda. Additionally, projects and money have been reduced to sustain the health sector. After discussing these common issues, the participants have elaborated a set of recommendations through a joint document, in which they highlighted the necessity for the EaP governments to pay more attention to the research and skills development sector when designing their policies, including those related to COVID-19. The Google document for proposals can be found [here](#).

Meeting with EU stakeholders

Friday 17 July, 11:00-13:00 CET

Session PowerPoint presentation available [here](#).



After a short introduction, the moderators of the sub-group discussions presented the key takeaways on each topic. The educational systems in almost all EaP countries were not ready to move from offline to online education. Many teachers lack digital competences and many young people do not have the necessary equipment or tools in order to learn online. Civil society is providing support and organises different courses to improve digital competences of teachers.

For culture, the vulnerable condition of independent and freelance workers in the field was underlined. Still, some ideas on how to improve the situation were shared. For instance, an online platform to boost sales of local art products. Regarding research and skills, the main challenge is the lack of funding. The economic consequences of the pandemic further exacerbate this problem. Lastly, related to youth and mobility, the transition to online working and learning constitutes a real challenge.

Following the update from civil society, **Bella Nestorova**, team leader at DG NEAR, highlighted how quickly EU support was mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic. 10 million of support was reserved for vulnerable groups. In addition, through the rapid response mechanism for civil society, they have managed to mobilize funds for remote education and assistance to teachers who are facing challenges to switch to online education.

Next, **Ivana Vrhovski**, policy officer at DG EAC, reaffirmed that it is essential to preserve the right to education and training, even in a situation which imposed many restrictions like the pandemic. The issue with moving from offline to online learning is that not all countries have the same starting point. The digital infrastructure and the preparedness of teachers are different. Also, not everyone has access to digital devices. Privacy and protection of data is also an issue. In regard to Erasmus+, she stated that in the current situation the safety of participants is a priority. Increased digital collaboration will be encouraged in the future. There is a growing consensus that education in the future will be increasingly a blend between online and offline learning. Therefore, the EU Commission tries to provide many online tools to support countries in this process. These tools are also available for EaP countries. For instance, the School Education Gateway provides courses for teachers to support them in the preparation of classes.

Subsequently, the invited speaker **Almut Brunckhorst**, team leader at DG NEAR, presented different facts on the initiatives in the youth sector. Erasmus+ remains the key program in support to youth. She insisted on the importance to promote the increased participation of disadvantaged youth in programs like Erasmus+ or the EaP European School in Georgia. Even though the Erasmus+ financing inside the EU has been multiplied, this does not mean that it can increase the same way for the EaP. The money for Erasmus+ for the EaP is related to the external action budget. If it is increased for Erasmus+, there will be less for culture in the EaP. She underlined that there needs to be a balance. After Almut Brunckhorst's presentation, she replied to several questions of participants.



Ana Indoitu, moderator of the session took the opportunity to reaffirm the importance to support the creation of a digital infrastructure for education and ensure inclusion on all levels. Learning is becoming increasingly blended between online and offline. Therefore, the digital skills need to be matched with the digital infrastructure from both the student and teacher sides. She concluded that programs like Erasmus+, EU4Youth, the EaP school and the EaP fellowship program are all great opportunities for continued collaboration.

