



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND STATE AUTHORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) cover a broad spectrum of organisations, being key actors in public policies, their input being valuable for the whole society, consolidating social trust, tolerance, openness, and transparency, by playing their role as service providers, watchdogs, and advocates of change in promoting democracy and overall well-being. Civil society is defined as “a public space for citizens to engage in collective debate and self-expression, and where public opinions that influence public policy are formed. This space lies between the family and the state, is independent from the state and is legally protected” (Lesnevich, 2013). Civil society is considered to be “one of the most enduring and confusing concepts in social science [...], an elastic concept, seen by many as a part of society (the world of voluntary associations), by some as a kind of society (marked out by certain social norms), and by others as a space for citizen action and engagement (described as the public square or sphere)” (Edwards, 2011). For this paper, we will adopt the definition of civil society as “the associational activities involving non-governmental organisations, charities, pressure groups, community groups, campaigning organisations and social movements” (Chaney, 2017). Hence, many types of organisations are considered civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations, labour unions, community groups, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and other not-for-profit organisations, with the range of organisations classified as CSOs continuing to expand.



In this framework, the literature comprises numerous studies and reports which emphasize the role of CSOs as advocates for policy changes, by influencing legislative processes, by creating platforms for public dialogue and organizing campaigns, by monitoring government performance and holding public authorities accountable for their decisions, by providing services to citizens, conducting research, and mediating conflicts. Furthermore, some specialists start from the premise that civil society organisations have a crucial contribution to society, by “generating well-being for the whole community” (Şoproni and Petrila, 2025).

As a result of vast differentiation among countries, the relationship between CSOs and national authorities differs; in some countries, the state retains its position to provide public services to citizens, while in other countries, in some specific areas, the CSOs have taken over from the state. With reference to the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter Moldova), “the communist regime effectively dismantled existing civil society structures, leaving a void that needed to be filled” (Zakota and Albu, 2025). The formation of a civil society was strongly connected to radical reforms that took place in this country after 1991, when the country emerged as an independent republic, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this context, such organisations flourished, the scale and their profile increased, while the dialogue between state and social partners was gradually institutionalized. Thus, the non-governmental sector has developed in Moldova, evolving from a small group of organisations dedicated to social and humanitarian assistance into a diverse network of organisations addressing a wide range of issues, from community development to environmental protection and human rights.

Taking into consideration this specific context, our paper brings into discussion the relationship between the civil society organisations (CSOs) and the public authorities in Moldova, by using as theoretical ground the New Governance Theory, an approach that looks at how public and non-governmental actors interact and share power in governing society, providing a framework for understanding how decision-making power is distributed and managed between state and non-state actors and how the new tools of public action rely on third parties. The public sector in liberal democracies has been marked by numerous public management reforms, driven by governments’ ongoing efforts to make administrations more efficient, effective, flexible, and resilient. Therefore, research in this field has sought to develop appropriate theoretical frameworks to explain and analyse these new directions. Consequently, the literature has been structured around major models designed to capture the developments, such as the New Public Management, the Neo-Weberian State, and the New Public Governance, which represent the main theoretical frameworks in the contemporary study of public management reform (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). While governance refers to “the systems of authoritative norms, rules, institutions, and practices by means of which any collectivity, from the local to the global, manages its common affairs” (Reggie, 2014), New Public Governance is used as a general term to describe the



growing reliance on governance networks and partnerships designed to strengthen the collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as the public and non-profit sectors, with the aim of managing complex issues and creating public value (Krogh and Triantafillou, 2024). Thus, “the upshot is an elaborate system of third-party government in which crucial elements of public authority are shared with a host of non-governmental or other-governmental actors” (Salamon, 2001).

Starting with these assumptions and building on this theoretical background, we tried to evaluate the collaboration between these actors, the support provided by state authorities to civil society organisations, and the effectiveness of their implication in the development of public affairs, as perceived by civil society organisations. So, what we are looking at is the opinion of CSOs concerning the process of communication with state authorities, the perceived support coming from the state, and barriers encountered in carrying out their activities. Therefore, the main research questions are as follows: How do CSOs perceive and experience their involvement in decision-making processes with public authorities? What challenges or limitations do CSOs encounter in their interactions with public authorities? What obstacles hinder effective collaboration between CSOs and public authorities? And, of particular importance, according to CSOs, what factors or practices could contribute to a more sustainable and effective partnership with state authorities in Moldova, where the term ‘sustainable’ is understood as the ability to continue a process over a period of time.

Literature review

The literature regarding CSOs is very rich and examines several broader issues, from their role in society as service providers, evolution and key factors that influence their performance (Clayton et al., 2000; Budescu et al., 2004; Bartsch and Kohlmorgen, 2007; Collmer, 2011; Budurina-Goreacii, 2014), to their resilience in periods of crisis, funding and sustainability issues (Cukrowski et al., 2003; Lutsevych, 2013; Chiriac and Tugui, 2014; Balutel, 2019; Costea and Brie, 2025). The studies have highlighted that the key challenges facing CSOs in service delivery revolve around accountability, quality, and accessibility, with fundamental differences between these organisations in industrialized countries and those that emerged in developing countries. Most countries have long-established universal social service programs, and current reforms aim to enhance both the efficiency and quality of service delivery. Thus, in the industrialized world, the main challenge has been reforming the welfare state by expanding the role of private and voluntary sectors. Conversely, in much of the developing world, where welfare states are largely absent, governments and CSOs continue to face difficulties in ensuring the provision of basic services to the majority of the population (Clayton et al., 2000).

Regarding CSOs in Moldova, some have argued that their resilience largely rests on three main pillars: first, the functionality of the legal framework, which continues



to be a fragile foundation for CSO sustainability; second, coalition-building capacity, which is improving but still requires further development, particularly at the level of technical platforms; and third, collaboration with development partners, which plays a decisive role in ensuring the financial viability of CSOs (Balutel, 2019). In addition, specialists have tackled the issue of polarization of civil society in Moldova, trying to emphasize the main political cleavages and the two opposing vectors that persist in society, the pro-Western attitude and the pro-Russian one, two poles that sustain in a disjunctive direction the projects and civic attitudes (Dolghi et al., 2025), while the involvement of CSOs in the decision-making process and the obstacles encountered in dealing with conflict resolutions were also underscored (Pop-Flanja and Herța, 2025; Venturi, 2025). In this context, it has been noted that although the number of registered NGOs in Moldova has increased, citizen participation in their activities has remained low, making Moldova's NGO sector relatively underdeveloped, citing "the weak economy, unstructured social system, and lack of civic culture as major factors that lead to the absence of a civil society in a liberal democratic sense" (Țirdea and Chobanu, 2018). It has also been stated that Moldova "continues to be one of the regimes that have fulfilled certain democratic requirements in terms of procedures but lacks democratic essence at a societal level" (Corpădean and Pantea, 2025).

Lately, further studies on NGOs in Moldova have analysed the evolution of these organisations and their contribution to various processes, such as Moldova's accession to the European Union and the development of a European identity, particularly through cultural education, advocacy, or public awareness campaigns, highlighting the key factors that can facilitate or hinder the promotion of European values, as well as the measures that need to be taken to support these processes. As main conclusions, the experts have suggested that "implications of Moldovan CSOs should be more focused and oriented toward supporting the state actors" (Ciot and Șargarovschi, 2024). Likewise, although "acknowledging a fragmented dialogue between civil society and government" (Barth and Stoica, 2026), institutional cooperation is seen as a key component in the integration process, which must be strengthened. Moreover, analysing the relationship between public administration and civil society organisations, Palihovici noted the lack of institutional capacity in public administration and the deficiencies in financial support provided to civil society organisations. The author revealed that financial deficiencies reduce the capacity of these organisations to develop organisational departments responsible for monitoring the quality of public policy implementation (Palihovici, 2021).

Recently, given the context of armed conflict in Ukraine, studies have focused on the development of civil society (Costea and Brie, 2025) and its role in supporting the population affected by war, by analysing the refugee situation in the Republic of Moldova, the funding of the civil society sector and refugee management techniques (Polgár et al., 2025). The authors emphasized the difficulties in terms of funding, noting that CSOs in Moldova tend to be relatively small and may lack the experience or capacity needed to meet donor requirements for funding or support. Consequently,



larger CSOs with established experience and sufficient human resources are better positioned to secure these funds and related opportunities. Since funding is often directed toward larger organisations, smaller, grassroots CSOs are effectively marginalized in the process (Polgár et al., 2025).

There are also briefing papers and reports that analyse either the status of civil society in Moldova as such or in comparison with other countries like Romania, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia or Belarus (Bădescu et al., 2004, Boulègue, 2018, Lutsevych, 2013, Macrinici, 2018, Palihovici, 2021). Results illustrated similarities between the behaviour of citizens from Romania and Moldova in the way that, in both countries, citizens tend to show limited engagement in civic life. Therefore, few citizens participate in organisations or volunteer their time. Moreover, they exhibit low levels of trust toward fellow citizens and even less toward political authorities. Their confidence in democratic institutions is weak, and they demonstrate little of the tolerance typically associated with democratic citizenship (Bădescu et al., 2004). Lutsevych concluded that civil society in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine remains fragile, as citizens possess limited capacity to shape the political environment due to low civic engagement, entrenched clientelism, and corruption. In all three contexts, people are largely excluded from public debates on key issues because local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) lack the means to help citizens articulate their views or influence state policies. Moreover, Western-funded organisations often operate in isolation from the broader society, forming what Lutsevych describes as an ‘NGO-cracy’ - a system in which professional NGO leaders leverage their connections with domestic policymakers and Western donors to shape public policy without genuine grassroots representation (Lutsevych, 2013). Macrinici (2018) remarked that the inclusion of civil society in Moldova’s legislative process has gradually improved in recent years, but its overall influence on policymaking continues to be limited.

Starting from these premises, this study fills the gap in the literature and represents a substantial contribution to the field of civil society studies by analysing civil society organisations from their own standpoint and based on their opinions regarding the process of communication with local or national authorities, the extent to which organisational efforts are supported by the state, and obstacles encountered in carrying out their activities. We also sought to examine the opinions of civil society representatives on enhancing relations with public administration, drawing on their expertise and firsthand experience with specific, day-to-day challenges, and to identify their recommendations for strengthening civic engagement in decision-making processes in Moldova. Drawing on the respondents’ answers, we aimed to assess the collaboration between civil society organisations and state authorities, the extent of support provided by public administration, and the effectiveness of CSOs’ involvement in shaping public policy.



Methodology

As mentioned above, through this qualitative study we approached the civil sector from inside and aimed to answer the following questions: How do CSOs perceive and experience their involvement in decision-making processes with public authorities? What challenges or limitations do CSOs encounter in their interactions with public authorities? What obstacles hinder effective collaboration between CSOs and public authorities? And, of particular importance, according to CSOs, what factors or practices could contribute to a more sustainable and effective partnership with state authorities in Moldova? The aim of this study was to achieve a comprehensive and in-depth understanding through a detailed analysis of specific data.

To answer the research questions, we examined the viewpoint of the CSOs by adopting a qualitative approach, with data being collected through structured interviews administered to representatives of non-governmental organisations who have personally undergone the experience in question. According to Lim, qualitative interviews are a powerful tool for examining real-world issues, particularly in revealing the social, organisational, and political dynamics that influence decision-making and policy implementation, thereby supporting deeper insight and more targeted solutions (Lim, 2025). Therefore, the questions addressed were structured in three main sections. The first section comprised questions concerning the primary activities undertaken by the organisation. The second section addressed the organisation's involvement at both local and national levels, its interactions with state authorities, and the challenges encountered in implementing specific activities. The third section focused on questions exploring potential strategies to enhance the participation of civil society organisations at the national and local levels.

This study uses non-probability sampling and employs purposive sampling, where relevant participants were chosen. In addition, snowball sampling was used to get expert information concerning the purposes of the study. The questions were addressed online to increase the objectivity of answers' interpretation and to allow us a convenient comparability of different respondents' answers. This study is exploratory, which is why its results cannot be generalized. Consequently, they are not representative of all civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova; however, achieving representativeness was not the objective of this research. The research design was flexible, by building theory through examining reality from multiple perspectives, and attributing great emphasis to how respondents perceive the actions and events. This allowed us an in-depth understanding of similarities and differences in personal experiences, along with a holistic understanding of phenomena.

The research was conducted between January and March 2025, and the invitation to participate in this study was addressed to 177 organisations, out of which 63 organisations responded. Compared to the total number of civil society organisations in Moldova, as of December 2024, there were 13,284 CSOs registered in the

Republic of Moldova, including public associations, foundations, private institutions, employer associations, trade unions, and other types of nonprofit organisations (Public Services Agency, 2025); the real number of active organisations being difficult to estimate. Some authors have stated that the number of active nonprofit organisations could be close to the number of organisations reporting to the National Bureau of Statistics, namely approximately 3,525 organisations in 2019 (Macrinici, 2020), while other authors have noted that the list of associations, foundations, and private institutions receiving the percentage designation included 962 organisations in December 2022, cautiously suggesting that approximately 1,000 organisations were operating nationwide at that time (Zakota and Albu, 2025).

As for the organisations included in our study, we have collected their email addresses from databases available online. Specifically, participants were searched for and identified on the official websites, their field of activity being thoroughly analysed. Building on a purposive sample, the sample frame of this research was narrowed down to those CSOs that answered our request.

Throughout the whole study, the aspects of ethical conduct and considerations such as anonymity and informed consent were respected, and no personal data were collected.

Results and discussion

The discussion begins with a typological analysis of the respondents, followed by the categorization of their responses into three thematic areas: (a) engagement of CSOs in decision-making processes and public support; (b) current patterns of collaboration between CSOs and public authorities and encountered difficulties; and (c) proposals for the development of a new framework for cooperation from the perspective of CSOs.

Commencing with a typological analysis of the respondents, it is noteworthy that 79.4% of the organisations participating in this study were established over a decade ago, 11.1% have between five and ten years of experience in the field, and 9.5% have less than five years of experience. It was also observed that their primary areas of activity encompass, inter alia, the following: (a) the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and the provision of specialized services; (b) the protection and promotion of human rights; (c) the advancement of democracy and the rule of law; (d) environmental protection and biodiversity conservation; (e) sustainable development; (f) public health; (g) the prevention and combating of corruption; and (h) the promotion of participatory culture and advocacy. Therefore, it should be noted that our cohort of respondents comprises organisations that engage in a diverse range of activities, including advocacy for youth rights, educational initiatives, training and development of young talents, and consultancy services for local public authorities in the design, drafting, and implementation of sustainable development



projects and strategies for public health. Their area of expertise also encompasses anti-corruption policies, legal assistance for whistleblowers, monitoring of human rights conditions, combating hate speech and ill-treatment within penitentiary institutions, providing hot meals to elderly individuals living in extreme poverty, and promoting accessibility to social infrastructure for persons with reduced mobility. Some of the organisations included in the study operate primarily at the local level, while others are active throughout the Republic of Moldova.

a. Engagement of CSOs in Decision-Making Processes and Public Support

Among the 63 organisations surveyed, only three reported that they were not engaged in decision-making processes at either the local or central level. The remaining organisations indicated various forms of involvement, such as participating in monitoring activities related to local decision-making, attending public hearings and consultations, and contributing to working groups and discussions between parliamentary groups and civil society organisations. In accordance with the Law on local public administration, the local public administration authorities through which local autonomy is exercised in villages (communes) and towns (municipalities) are the local councils, as deliberative bodies, and the mayors, as executive bodies. Similarly, the local public administration authorities through which local autonomy is exercised in districts are the district councils, as deliberative bodies, and the district president, as executive body (Law no. 436/2007). At the central level, ministries and other central administrative authorities shall cooperate with local public administration authorities and civil society, ensuring that these entities are consulted and effectively involved in the decision-making process, as provided by law (Law no. 98/2012).

Among the official platforms and public consultation mechanisms, the particip.gov.md portal was highlighted by our respondents as a key tool, enabling NGOs to monitor legislative drafts and submit recommendations. Additionally, advisory structures associated with local and central authorities provide opportunities for NGOs to play an active role, including participation in intersectoral working groups as well as public hearings and meetings of local councils and parliament.

Moreover, other forms of participation mentioned include strengthening the capacity of civil society representatives to monitor, evaluate, and provide recommendations for improving local policies and governance practices; transferring knowledge to other non-governmental organisations and enhancing their capacity to oversee local projects and programmes; fostering dialogue between local government and civil society actors for the development and formulation of recommendations aimed at implementing the legislative framework necessary for effective local governance; as well as providing information and advisory services to the public and monitoring compliance with transparency requirements in the decision-making process.



NGOs can use the press, television, and social media to raise awareness of specific issues and influence the public agenda, as media would act as a facilitator between public and institutional agendas. They may also employ advocacy tools directed at authorities to request specific actions, as well as organise events inviting public authorities to discuss community issues.

Nevertheless, according to the majority of respondents, several factors account for the limited or non-existent involvement of certain organisations in current public administration activities. Foremost among these is the inadequate implementation of legislation governing civil society participation, alongside insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Additionally, the lack of resources, experience, and skills within some organisations, as well as their perception by authorities as oppositional structures, were cited. Many NGOs also face constraints due to insufficient human resources and the absence of dedicated personnel to monitor local public administrative budgets, attend meetings consistently, or actively participate in decision-making processes. Furthermore, a shortage of specialists in legislative and public policy matters limits their capacity to analyse and influence adopted regulations and strategies. These barriers collectively reduce NGOs' level of involvement in administrative and legislative processes, despite their essential role in promoting inclusive and effective public policies.

Regarding the support provided by the public authorities to enhance the employability of non-governmental organisations in addressing public issues, several implemented measures were mentioned by the respondents. These include: 1. The percentage designation mechanism, allowing the allocation of 2% of individual income tax pursuant to Tax Code No. 1163 of April 24, 1997; 2. The facilitation of access to certain public institutions (such as penitentiary facilities, for the purpose of conducting monitoring activities, measuring cell space, and similar functions); 3. The awarding of contracts for works and services; 4. The implementation of non-reimbursable funding programs, particularly in the areas of social welfare, youth development, culture, and business promotion. Nevertheless, it was noted that state funding remains limited and NGOs continue to rely heavily on external donors.

Other respondents highlighted access to information, as well as participation in working groups and consultation processes, as additional forms of support. Certain local and district councils also assisted in organising social and cultural events, along with information campaigns focused on specific issues such as home care, active aging, and social inclusion.

However, several respondents expressed critical views, emphasizing that support from public administration and decision-makers was limited and, in many cases, more declarative than effective. Although discussions and commitments to collaboration were often made, in practice the NGOs experienced inadequate support from public administration. This was largely attributed to bureaucratic obstacles, the absence of a functional consultation mechanism, and frequent changes at the decision-making level. Respondents reported that the financial and logistical resources provided



were minimal, while the actual engagement of public administration in supporting NGOs' initiatives remained weak. The most cited form of institutional support was the participation and involvement of public institutions' representatives in various activities and events.

b. Current Patterns of Collaboration between CSOs and Public Authorities, and the Difficulties Encountered

This section aims to present examples of effective collaboration between non-governmental organisations and public authorities, highlighting both successful initiatives and the challenges that hinder such partnerships.

An example of effective practice was provided by an association working with persons with disabilities, which played a significant role in the approval process of the *Assisted Employment Procedure for Persons with Disabilities*. The association's representative declared that they actively participated in consultations and meetings with representatives of the specialized ministry and national agencies, contributing to the joint development and agreement of the draft decision. Therefore, on May 26, 2021, the Government approved the procedure, which constitutes a comprehensive framework of measures designed to provide individualized support to persons with disabilities who are motivated to work, facilitating their access to employment opportunities that correspond to their skills and abilities. As a result, private and associative social service providers are now authorized to deliver assisted employment services. This development is expected to expand the number of organisations capable of offering high-quality employment support services for persons with disabilities in Moldova. Consequently, individuals benefiting from such services will have greater opportunities to enhance their standard of living and contribute financially to their families. On the other hand, it was mentioned that for many economic operators in Moldova, employing persons with disabilities remains a complex and demanding process, requiring substantial responsibility and effort. Employers who are nevertheless motivated to hire such individuals often require state assistance. Although Moldovan legislation formally supports the employment of persons with disabilities, it lacks effective enforcement mechanisms. For instance, there is currently no systematic procedure for reporting the number of persons with disabilities employed, and, aside from the Labour Inspectorate, no other competent authority is tasked with verifying compliance in this area. The primary advantage of the government's approval of such a procedure lies in the potential to allocate sufficient resources for engaging a larger number of specialists in assisted employment. At present, the limited number of such professionals remains disproportionate to the high demand from beneficiaries seeking employment.

Another respondent, representing a highly visible organisation in this sector that fights for human rights and democratic processes, identified several positive aspects

of NGO-government collaboration. These included the open and regular participation of civil society representatives in the development, implementation, and monitoring of public policies, the freedom of expression in the decision-making process, the absence of restrictions or hostility, and the establishment of expert councils (with nominal lists of members) by permanent parliamentary committees as part of a standing consultative platform aimed at fostering dialogue and transparency in policymaking. Furthermore, the respondent highlighted that central public authorities consistently publish announcements, draft decisions, and calls for consultation on the participation platform [particip.gov.md], which is freely accessible to the public.

Nevertheless, several shortcomings were also noted. These include issues of accessibility, the absence of an effective notification and feedback system, the use of overly technical or rigid language, and insufficiently detailed information regarding proposed amendments or NGO-submitted suggestions. Another positive element mentioned was the existence of self-organising structures within the NGO community, such as national platforms and networks that seek to establish cooperative relations with public administration authorities – for example, the *Coalition for Free and Fair Elections* platform.

Conversely, the respondent also expressed several criticisms. Among the most significant was the limited timeframe allowed for NGOs to formulate opinions or positions on draft legislation. Many legislative proposals are reportedly examined and adopted within an extremely short period, leaving insufficient time for detailed review and the development of well-substantiated positions. Additionally, comprehensive information about draft legislation is not always made public; related documentation frequently omits summaries of NGO suggestions or updates on subsequent amendments.

Challenges were also identified at the local level, where communication and engagement remain difficult, as most local and district councils lack transparent communication tools. At the central level, deficiencies were observed in the decision-making process: during the parliamentary session concluding in July 2024, public consultations were held for only 16% of the bills adopted, and among the 14 ministries, only 11 had established permanent consultative platforms – within which NGO representation remains limited. Moreover, “more than 80 per cent of parliamentary initiatives are not consulted on, and the website is outdated, with limited options for tractability of legal initiatives and a lack of information of public interest; 10 out of 11 parliamentary committees have established expert councils including CSOs, but these are not yet functional” (Promo-LEX, 2024). Finally, with respect to access to information, the respondent reported persistent problems such as evasive or incomplete answers, refusals to provide information, and an overly restrictive interpretation of personal data protection provisions.

Similar challenges were reported by several youth organisations, whose mission is to create opportunities for youth to actively engage in society, promote volunteering, and advocate for young people’s rights through civic and social initiatives.



The organisations emphasized several critical issues, including the absence of a sustainable funding system, excessive bureaucratic procedures, limited engagement by public officials, and insufficient resources to support long-term projects. Moreover, youth involvement in civic processes is often largely formalistic, with participation serving a symbolic rather than substantive role. Engagement from local authorities is frequently low, and there are no established mechanisms to ensure sustainable collaboration or regular interaction between youth organisations and public authorities. Finally, prevailing stereotypes regarding youth initiatives – particularly perceptions of inexperience – tend to diminish trust in proposals put forward by young actors.

According to one respondent, the organisation, though founded more than a decade ago, experienced several distinct challenges after a period of inactivity. The most significant of these challenges include: (a) Lack of clear examples and guidelines: There were no concrete examples or explicit guidelines outlining the necessary steps for proposing or influencing public decisions. This lack of clarity hindered effective engagement with public authorities; (b) Difficulty in identifying appropriate communication channels: A major obstacle involved determining the relevant institution or individual to whom proposals and suggestions should be addressed. The appropriate point of contact was not always evident, particularly in cases where multiple authorities or institutions had overlapping areas of competence; (c) Bureaucratic constraints: Excessive bureaucracy frequently impeded interaction with public authorities. Overly formal language, complex administrative procedures, and procedural rigidity often led to delays or complications in the submission and processing of requests.

Based on experience, another respondent noted that public authorities are generally open to dialogue and collaboration. However, achieving effective communication remains a long and complex process. One of the main obstacles identified was the need for the organisation to continuously demonstrate its credibility and the legitimacy of its objectives, particularly in the early stages of engagement. This reflects an initial lack of trust that requires considerable time and effort to overcome. The bureaucratic nature of administrative procedures was also highlighted as a significant challenge. Frequently, in order to reach the relevant authorities and obtain responses or solutions, the organisation had to navigate multiple procedural steps and submit extensive documentation, which ultimately hinders and delays progress. The respondent emphasized that it remains a continuous effort to address these issues and to demonstrate the organisation's capacity to contribute meaningfully to societal development and to generate positive outcomes for citizens.

In contrast, another respondent recounted a case of limited success in collaboration with state institutions. The organisation, through its representatives, proposed that the government develop a targeted programme to provide financial support and implement energy efficiency projects in kindergartens and schools. The initiative aimed to strategically install photovoltaic systems on the roofs of these institutions to reduce the country's dependence on conventional energy sources.

However, the government's response was limited to distributing compensation to the population to offset rising gas and electricity tariffs. As a result, this approach continues to perpetuate energy dependence, thereby allowing the cycle to repeat on an annual basis.

Insights from a respondent indicate variation in the state's approach depending on the issues addressed. It was noted that no major obstacles had been encountered in collaboration with state institutions. Over the past four years, as mentioned by our respondent, the overall operating environment has been conducive to both the development of civil society and its participation in decision-making processes. A high level of openness has been observed, particularly among central authorities such as the government, parliament, and presidential administration. These institutions generally demonstrate a willingness to engage, seek input from specialized NGOs, and involve them in working groups or consultative platforms. However, in sensitive areas such as the prevention of torture and inhuman treatment in prisons, authorities tend to exhibit reluctance, likely to avoid drawing attention to systemic problems. The extent of openness therefore depends largely on the institution in question and the sensitivity of the issue. Furthermore, in matters related to the Transnistrian region, public consultations remain absent, although informal cooperation between NGOs and state authorities exists, particularly in providing assistance to victims of human rights violations. Decision-making in this area remains non-transparent, primarily due to underlying political sensitivities.

Overall, the majority of organisations identified several positive aspects in their interactions with public authorities, including openness to dialogue, inclusiveness within working groups, and acknowledgement of their professional expertise across various fields. These factors have facilitated the promotion of tailored solutions that address the specific needs of beneficiaries. Nonetheless, organisations consistently reported similar challenges, including the slow pace of reform implementation, insufficient financial resources allocated to social services, and persistent difficulties in ensuring their long-term sustainability. In this regard, a long-established organisation with more than 30 years of experience noted that the current government demonstrates increased willingness to engage in discussions on public matters; however, a lack of adequate administrative capacity often prevents timely and professionally grounded responses to such requests. Several organisations have highlighted the same issue, albeit expressed in different terms, generally noting a resistance generated largely by stereotypes and prejudices that persist in society, as well as individual biases, particularly in relation to the highly sensitive areas in which these organisations operate. At the same time, multiple organisations emphasized that when local authorities genuinely seek collaboration, the outcomes tend to be especially positive, leading to effective and meaningful initiatives. These perspectives are widely shared across the civil society sector, reflecting a common understanding of both the potential and the limitations of cooperation with public institutions.



c. Proposals for the Development of a New Framework for Cooperation: The Perspective of CSOs

The development of an effective framework for cooperation necessitates concerted efforts from both public authorities and non-governmental organisations. In the responses provided by organisations, similar ideas were identified. Specifically, the respondents emphasized the need to establish a clear and transparent framework for collaboration that governs cooperation between state authorities and non-governmental organisations. This framework should promote continuous dialogue through access to public consultations and participatory platforms, simplify bureaucratic procedures, and include evaluation and feedback mechanisms designed to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Additionally, it should support training and capacity building initiatives through specialized training programs.

When inquired to propose measures for strengthening the relationship between NGOs and public authorities, one respondent suggested several key actions: (a) establishing institutionalised mechanisms for public consultation, such as joint working groups composed of representatives from both sectors, transparent and mandatory public consultations, and regular meetings of forums aimed at exchanging best practices and identifying shared solutions; (b) ensuring access to public information by publishing relevant data on public policies, local budgets, and governmental strategies, thereby enabling NGOs to participate in the decision-making process in an informed and evidence-based manner; (c) simplifying procedures for requesting public information and ensuring timely institutions responses; (d) creating a public digital registry through which NGOs can review draft legislation and submit proposals; (e) fostering strategic partnerships between authorities and NGOs not only during the co-creation of public policies but also throughout their implementation; (f) developing social contracts that allow NGOs to provide social, educational, or advocacy services in partnership with public authorities; (g) organizing training sessions for both civil servants and NGOs representatives on cross-sector collaboration, transparency, and participatory governance; and (h) promoting a culture of trust and constructive dialogue through regular meetings and effective feedback mechanisms.

Some key lessons identified by NGOs based on experience and particularly relevant for those beginning work in this sector were also underlined in our research. One of the most significant challenges is the initial phase of establishment, which is often difficult due to the lack of clear and precise guidelines to support organisational growth and effective institutionalisation. It has also been observed that external support for NGOs is frequently insufficient. Both peer organisations and public authorities do not always provide the necessary assistance. Major obstacles include the absence of mentoring from more experienced organisations, limited financial and administrative resources, and the challenges associated with building trust. In addition, in many cases, the support provided by public administration



authorities remains inadequate, necessitating that NGOs learn to operate within a complex bureaucratic system and manage a range of administrative challenges independently. Thus, the sector can be challenging, but also extremely rewarding as the organisation may succeed in bringing about positive change. It is essential to be patient, flexible, adaptable, and proactive to obtain resources and assistance in achieving established objectives, taking into consideration that circumstances change rapidly, and community needs can evolve at an unpredictable pace.

Therefore, effective communication remains a critical tool; disseminating accurate information to the public and promoting outcomes through social media and public events enhances both trust and civic participation. Furthermore, success within the non-governmental sector depends on the continuous enhancement of project management and leadership capacities, underscoring the importance of ongoing professional development and lifelong learning. Likewise, consistency and perseverance were mentioned among the necessary skills in the field of non-governmental work. One respondent noted that small steps lead to big results and even small initiatives may produce significant changes in society if they are implemented consistently and effectively, while another respondent considered that to be heard you must be louder.

For the future, respondents believe that establishing a clear and formalised framework for collaboration, promoting online dialogue, and implementing effective monitoring and feedback mechanisms could facilitate the successful implementation of civic projects and the efficient delivery of public services.

Conclusions and recommendations

Through this study, we explored the viewpoint of the CSOs, and we believe that the results of our research could help policymakers and CSOs to find ways that would deepen their collaboration and coordination in the process of policymaking. Of course, there are some limitations or drawbacks of such an approach, and we agree that generalizing results to a wider population is problematic. To counter these shortcomings, we have chosen to assess all 63 organisations that answered our request, even if this could reduce the depth of our analysis, but, in exchange, would raise the possibility of some generalization. Moreover, another drawback would be the subjectivity in interpreting results, even if we tried to avoid biased interpretations. Future research could integrate the viewpoint of policymakers and public authorities to integrate the proposals of both parties into one systemic policy.

The recommendations of CSOs mostly focus on 'soft' elements of resilience. Among the most significant recommendations, the following should be noted:

- (1) Establishment of a formal consultation mechanism: The creation of structured platforms for dialogue between NGOs and public authorities, such as permanent working groups or advisory committees, is essential to ensure continuous and effective collaboration.



- (2) Transparency and access to information: Regular publication of draft legislation, policy documents, and institutional work agendas on accessible platforms should be ensured, enabling NGOs to provide timely, informed input and expertise.
- (3) Clear feedback mechanisms: Public authorities should provide reasoned and transparent responses to NGOs' proposals, specifying whether and how their recommendations have been integrated into policy outcomes and, if not, offering clear justifications for their exclusion.
- (4) Early involvement of NGOs in the legislative process: NGOs should be engaged from the earliest stages of conceptualisation and drafting of legislation, rather than only at the approval or formal public consultation stages.
- (5) Enhancing the predictability of collaboration: Establishing a clear and consistent consultation schedule is necessary to guarantee regular NGO participation in decision-making processes and to avoid last-minute or purely formal consultation.
- (6) Developing public-private partnerships: Public authorities and NGOs can cooperate through joint projects aimed at improving the implementation of public policies. Such collaboration may be formalized through partnership agreements and supported by transparent funding mechanisms.
- (7) Creating a single point of contact for NGOs: A dedicated structure or liaison unit within public institutions should be established to facilitate interaction with civil society organisations, coordinate communication, and manage consultation processes effectively.

Challenges in resuming activities were linked to complex administrative procedures and lengthy response times, which often hinder effective cooperation and the implementation of initiatives. A lack of transparency and limited access to public information also posed challenges – obtaining data essential for developing evidence-based recommendations and policies was often difficult due to incomplete responses or the outright refusal of some institutions to provide relevant information. Frequent changes in administration and the absence of institutional continuity further disrupted cooperation; recurrent leadership changes and high staff turnover within public institutions led to interruptions in ongoing collaborations, often requiring discussions and partnerships to be rebuilt from the ground up. Additional obstacles included limited resources and the absence of clear mechanisms for stakeholder participation, as well as political influences and divergent institutional priorities. Finally, a persistent lack of a participatory culture remains evident: despite some progress in involving civil society in decision-making processes, certain institutions continue to exhibit a closed mindset, failing to regard public consultations and cooperation with NGOs as essential components of effective governance.

In conclusion, collaboration is the key to success, as one respondent mentioned; partnerships with other NGOs, local authorities, and international organisations significantly increase project effectiveness. Moreover, advocacy requires perseverance,



while promoting civic initiatives requires patience, strategic thinking, and a willingness to engage in lengthy negotiations. Funding remains a constant challenge and the most difficult aspect of NGOs' work, while flexibility and adaptability remain essential skills for survival.

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