



Evaluation of the EU's engagement with Civil Society in the enlargement, neighbourhood regions and Russia over the period 2007-2018

Volume I - Final Report

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Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission



Lead Implementing Partner in
partnership with

Adam Smith
International



PROMAN

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*The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view
which are not necessarily shared by the European Commission
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Final Report

This report consists of three volumes:

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Acronyms

AA	Association Agreements
AFET	European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs
BDS	Boycott-Divest-Sanctions
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CORLEAP	Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
CoTE	Centre of Thematic Expertise
CoTE-CS	Centre of Thematic Expertise on Civil Society Support
CRIS	Common External Relations Information System
CS	Civil Society
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
CSF	Civil Society Facility
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSO-LA	Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EaP CSF	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
EU MS	EU Member States
EUD	European Union Delegation
EURONEST	EU-Eastern Partnership parliamentary assembly
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreements
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties
GONGO	Government-organized non-governmental organisation
IBPP	Institution Building and Partnership Programme
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
IfS	Instrument for Stability
INFOOPS	Information Cooperation

IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IR	Inception Report
ISG	Inter-Service Steering Group
JC	Judgement Criteria
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSA	Non-State Actors
NSA-LA	Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECD DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
P2P	People 2 People
P4M	Partnership for Modernisation
QA	Quality Assurance
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RIL	Reconstructed Intervention Logic
ROM	Results-Oriented-Monitoring
TA	Technical Assistance
TACSO	Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations
ToR	Terms of Reference
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive summary

The evaluation's purpose, scope and background

This evaluation contributes to accountability, learning and improvement of policy and practice in relation to the EU's engagement with civil society in the Enlargement, Neighbourhood regions and Russia, between 2007 and 2018. The evaluation covers:

- **targeted financial support**, where actions are intended to strengthen the participation of civil society;
- **mainstreamed support**, i.e. support to civil society, as implementing partners, within EU sectoral cooperation, and in non-financial efforts of the EU to promote the inclusion of civil society organisations (CSOs) into sectoral policy dialogue;
- **policy-level engagement with civil society**, e.g. through policy dialogue, multi-stakeholder fora, consultations involving civil society organisations, in areas not covered by mainstreaming (above).

The geographical scope of the evaluation covers:

- **Enlargement region (i.e. candidates and potential candidates):** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey;
- **Neighbourhood East:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine;
- **Neighbourhood South:** Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine**, Syria, Tunisia;
- **The Russian Federation.**

Overall methodological approach

The evaluation was conducted between July 2018 and March 2020 by a team of senior evaluation experts with thematic experience in civil society, and in-depth knowledge of the regions covered by the evaluation. It consisted of four key phases: i) inception phase; ii) desk phase; iii) field phase; and iv) synthesis and reporting phase.

The evaluation methodology adopted a theory-based approach, guided by a series of reconstructed intervention logics (RILs), one for each sub-region. The RILs represent an evaluation tool, used to understand the 'intended' route, outcomes and eventual impact of the EU's support to civil society. They provide a framework on which key evaluation questions are mapped, in order to observe the extent to which key factors, influences and processes have either contributed to or hindered the achievement of results, and identify any unintended positive or negative outcomes.

The evaluation team created an inventory of EU actions which they classified as targeted or mainstreamed support to civil society. A sample of actions and non-financial initiatives were selected for document review and interview. No interviews were carried out with Russia-based stakeholders for security reasons. Two online surveys (one for EU staff responsible for the oversight of civil society engagement in the regions covered in the evaluation, based either in EUDs or in Brussels, and one for civil society respondents) were designed to extend the outreach to respondents across the regions covered in the evaluation. Document review included action-level documents, Call for Proposal documentation, Financing Decisions, Country Strategy Papers, Single Support Frameworks, Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society, thematic studies and evaluations, and training and information materials for EU staff. Field missions were conducted in all regionsⁱ apart from Russia, during which interviews were carried out with EU staff and CSO (grant beneficiary) representatives. Other stakeholders consulted for the evaluation included participants in regional civil society events and staff in European Commission (EC) headquarters in Brussels.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

** This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

ⁱ Missions were conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Morocco, Israel, Palestine, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine.

Overview of funds contracted to actions supporting civil society

In compiling an inventory of support to civil society, the evaluators have attempted to quantify the financial support that has been provided by the EU to civil society, and to differentiate between support that is 'targeted' and that which can be considered 'mainstreamed'. In order to obtain the most accurate picture, the analysis focussed on the last five years (2013-2018) only. In this period, the EU provided approximately EUR 250m of targeted and mainstreamed support annually. This figure represents **7% of total EU funds** contracted for external action in the regions covered by this evaluation. The relative importance of targeted and mainstreamed actions in the portfolio of EU-co-financed actions implemented by CSOs was similar in the Enlargement, Neighbourhood East and Neighbourhood South regions.

In the Enlargement region, there is no specific commitment earmarked for civil society in the geographical programme. However, targeted and mainstreamed support represented approximately 5% of EU funds contracted in these countries in 2013-2018: this included 9% in the Western Balkans and 1% in Turkey, where the environment is increasingly challenging for CSOs.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood, most country-level Single Support Frameworks (SSFs) earmark 5% of funds for civil society. The EU met this level of funding in most countries, through a combination of geographic and thematic programme spending.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, most country-level Single Support Frameworks (SSFs) also earmark 5% of funds for civil society. Several countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco) subsume civil society support into a broader category of capacity development for partner country stakeholders. The EU met this level of funding in most countries, through a combination of geographic and thematic programme spending. Most of the EU funds contracted to support civil society are delivered through mainstreamed rather than targeted support.

The geographic instruments provide more than 80% of EU funds contracted to targeted and mainstreamed support. Most of the rest comes from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities (CSO-LA) thematic programmes.

While the volume of funds contracted as either targeted or mainstreamed support to civil society has remained stable over the last five years, this is in striking contrast to the significant increase in funds contracted for the rest of EU cooperation in the countries covered by this evaluation. Between 2013 and 2018, the volume of contracted targeted and mainstreamed support to CSOs dropped by 20%, while the contracted volume of other types of EU operational support increased by 57%.

Main findings and conclusions

Relevance: the operating environment for civil society naturally varies from country to country, and yet there are distinct themes within the political contexts of the three main regions of this evaluation which have driven the EU's objectives and strategic approach in supporting civil society. In the Enlargement region, the EU accession process has defined the direction and nature of EU support, and the main financial instrument, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), has strengthened and systematised the participation of civil society in programming and implementation. Where the environment for civil society has become more restricted, for example in Turkey and also in Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina, the EU has adjusted its approach in response. This has also been the case in the Neighbourhood South where the EU has adapted to dramatic shifts in democratic processes, and also in the Neighbourhood East and in Russia where the EU has continued to find mechanisms to support civil society even when space has been shrinking over the period of the evaluation. For example, support to CSO engagement on non-controversial themes and mainstreaming of civil society in non-controversial sectors of EU cooperation can provide legitimacy and support to CSOs even when there is shrinking space for them to participate in democratic processes. Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (Neighbourhood countries) have found wide acceptance as a tool for joint analysis and elaboration of common priorities.

Within these contexts, the EU has sought to understand and better address the needs of civil society through more systematic consultation processes which feed into the design and implementation of targeted support, and facilitate civil society's engagement in policy dialogue. In this area, good examples can be seen, but there remains more that can be done to increase representation across civil society, and make this more meaningful, for example by improving follow-up. The EU has developed a range of modalities to deliver support to civil society, and having this choice of options at its disposal has allowed it to cater more appropriately to the diversity of the civil society sector, which ranges from small non-governmental organisations (NGOs), operating at the grassroots level, to large international organisations. In all regions, Financial Support to Third Parties (FTSP) is regarded as one of the most effective new ways of extending EU support to civil society. The significant number

of actions implemented by CSOs (27% of the total number of contracts for operational support to the regions of this evaluation) enables the EU to address a wide range of niche issues, respond rapidly to emerging issues, and support a range of experimental and pilot initiatives.

Stakeholder perceptions on the relevance of EU support to civil society are mostly positive or highly positive. In fact, critical comments on policy issues reported to the evaluators almost exclusively related to perceived inconsistencies, or issues where stakeholders considered that the EU should be more consistent and even more determined in the pursuit of the three priorities of the European Commission's 2012 Communication: 'The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations' (2012), which are: (i) to enhance efforts to promote a conducive environment for CSOs in partner countries; (ii) to promote a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in domestic policies of partner countries, in the EU programming cycle and in international processes; and (iii) to increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors more effectively. There is no significant stakeholder or group of stakeholders in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and neighbourhood countries proposing a reduction in EU support or even a significantly different approach to funding.

Efficiency: targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society represents 27% of the total number of contracts for operational support to the regions covered by this evaluation. This implies a significant commitment of EU staff time, particularly at EU Delegation (EUD) level. In a context of human resource constraints, the management of a large number of small contracts with CSOs continues to represent a significant efficiency challenge. While EUDs consider efficiency when making decisions on the most appropriate instruments and modalities to deploy, other factors such as suitability of the thematic coverage/target beneficiaries of the instrument and availability of funds are also key considerations. The FSTP modality is increasingly regarded as a cost-effective means through which to reach grassroots CSOs. An unintended consequence of FSTP, however, is that, while support delivered through grant programmes may be more cost-efficient at the EUD level, it favours the larger, international CSOs who have the organisational capacity to administer grant programmes. Medium level, national CSOs may be excluded since they are too large to participate as sub-grantees, and yet lack capacity to participate as lead organisations. Mainstreaming of civil society shows promise as a cost-effective means of widening and systematising support to civil society and is promoted by the EU. However, current EU systems are inadequate for measuring the cost-effectiveness of this approach.

Effectiveness: the EU's engagement with civil society has been highly effective at enhancing the role of civil society actors in policy dialogue processes, such as policy consultations, networks and national and regional civil society forums. However, the effectiveness of targeted financial support has sometimes been criticised for being too oriented towards EU systems and procedures. Rules and procedures associated with applying for and implementing actions in response to Calls for Proposals (CfPs), such as competitive procedures, one-off grants and lack of extension opportunities, do not encourage the kind of long-term capacity strengthening that CSOs require to become 'professionalised'. As mentioned, the EU has made significant use of FSTP for extending support to smaller, grassroots CSOs who lack the organisational capacity to independently apply for EU support in response to regular CfPs. However, at present, this remains concentrated in cooperation on themes of good governance, human rights and gender equality, with less use in other sectors of cooperation. The quantitative analysis conducted by this evaluation has found that a significant level of support is provided through mainstreaming which is a strategy that has been increasingly promoted by the EC as a way of systematically integrating civil society into all areas of cooperation, as has been occurring in the Neighbourhood South, in particular, over many years. However, feedback from this evaluation also suggests that, while the evidence shows that mainstreaming is commonplace, the concept is not widely and consistently understood by EUDs. As mentioned above, there is currently a lack of appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools to measure the effectiveness of mainstreaming as a way of providing support to civil society.

At present, EU systems do not effectively capture and report on the quantity and quality of civil society support across the board. A high proportion of actions implemented by CSOs are classified as support to governance and civil society, rather than using the DAC sector codes that are allocated to actions implemented by other types of organisation. In addition, the evaluation did not identify effective EU monitoring tools or reporting systems that tracked, for example, the divergence in Neighbourhood partner countries between indicative commitments to civil society in Single Support Frameworks (SSFs) and actual funds committed in Financing Decisions (FDs) or, in both Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, the volumes and thematic distribution of targeted and mainstreamed support. The EU's OPSYSⁱⁱ data management system does not record beneficiaries of FSTP, or permit the aggregation of data on grant size or on number of beneficiaries.

Impact: the long-term impacts of the EU's engagement with civil society vary across the regions of this evaluation, reflecting the differing political objectives that have governed its support to its Neighbourhood and

ⁱⁱ OPSYS is an IT platform currently being developed by Commission services to effectively and efficiently manage the whole EU external relations portfolio of interventions.

Enlargement regions and partners. In the Neighbourhood South, the EU's integrated approach, which has adapted to dramatic political changes over time, has contributed to the 'professionalisation' of CSOs enabling them to act independently and credibly across a range of civil society interests, and CSOs have been particularly successful when they have benefited from long-term support, combined with advocacy and policy dialogue opportunities. In the Enlargement region, EU accession has provided a framework for civil society engagement, and the EU has strongly promoted and supported civil society as an integral part of the IPA instrument, ensuring an active role in the enlargement process. At the same time, the EU has encouraged governments to put in place legislation and policy to improve government's recognition of civil society, and enhance their cooperation, although these are not yet established firmly enough to ensure long-term sustainability, as evidence from the situation in Turkey illustrates. In the Neighbourhood East, the EU's engagement with civil society has been significant in increasing the capacity of civil society organisations. This was most notable in the field of policy consultations and dialogue, both at national and bilateral and international level, where CSOs' competencies have increased across the board. The EU's structured approach to involving CSOs in policymaking has helped raise the profile and significance of civil society in policy dialogues in most Eastern Partnership countries.

Sustainability: there has been a gradual increase in the sustainability of civil society over the period covered by this evaluation. The EU has contributed to mitigating negative developments in the enabling environment and assisting CSOs in adapting, and modest improvements which can be associated with EU support to CSOs and to partner country governments have taken place in the enabling environment in some countries. The evaluation did not identify significant improvements in financial sustainability of CSO grant beneficiaries during the period covered by this evaluation. EU strategies and guidelines increasingly articulate a broad conception of capacity development that goes beyond grant application capacity. However, this evaluation did not find significant evidence of a corresponding diversification of capacity strengthening support. Despite significant and sustained investment in civil society capacity development, the EU continues to deal with a largely donor-dependent sector of CSOs. The competitive grant award procedure does not allow the EU to offer second phase financing to successful grant beneficiaries through direct awards, but some CSOs nevertheless receive follow up funding under competitive procedures. The themes and timing of CfPs vary, and selection and contracting of grants can take a long time. In this context, many CSOs demobilise professional staff, or shift from one theme to another to adjust to the availability of funds. The EU continues to provide significant capacity development support to improve applicants' ability to apply for one-off competitive grant funding, with rather less investment in capacity development support that might assist CSOs in diversification of income, and development of local resource mobilisation.

Coordination, complementarity and coherence: the EU has invested significant efforts in promotion of coordination with Member States (MS) and like-minded donors. These donors have participated actively in EUD-coordinated elaboration of European Joint Programming, Guidelines for Civil Society (Enlargement candidates and potential candidates) and Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (Neighbourhood countries). Coherence and complementarity have been improved overall, although MS cooperation in some Southern Neighbourhood countries is still affected by the divergent political assessments and priorities of EU services and MS.

EU added-value: the EU has maintained a presence as a major donor to civil society in all countries covered by this evaluation, in a period when many MS, donors, private foundations and international CSOs have reduced their grant-making activity. In the move towards joint programming, many EU Member States have reduced their support to civil society, particularly on themes of enabling environment and capacity development, which are a key focus of EU engagement in all countries. They have also increasingly adjusted their own support to seek complementarity with EU initiatives.

In the Western Balkans, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, the changes to which the EU contributed could not have happened in its absence. In the Neighbourhood South, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the changes to which the EU contributed could have happened without EU support but would have taken longer and with less probability of success, and the high volume of EU support would not have been replicated by other donors had the EU have withdrawn its support. In the Enlargement region, the EU successfully leverages political and operational dimensions for mutual reinforcement; and MS and like-minded donors would not have had the same influence. These dynamics are also present in the Neighbourhood countries, but the incentives that the EU has to offer are more modest and do not enjoy such widespread support as in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates.

Key recommendations

The EU should strengthen its monitoring of the translation of policy commitments towards civil society into effective programming. This particularly concerns the low alignment between earmarking of funds and contracting of targeted and mainstreamed funds, and the progress of mainstreaming of civil society. The EU could consider earmarking for civil society a specific proportion of bilateral funds allocated to the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates, as it does already in the SSF for the Neighbourhood countries.

EUDs in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions should consider permitting FSTP in a greater proportion of Calls for Proposals, extending the use of this modality beyond the governance, human rights and gender equality thematic cluster where it is currently concentrated. This would facilitate the engagement of a greater number and wider range of civil society actors. It could contribute to more grassroots and geographically diverse participation, as well as the engagement of specialised actors.

DG NEAR should consider encouraging grant beneficiaries to use the modality of FSTP as the main purpose of the action. This would allow existing foundations and grant-making CSO to provide a large number of small grants using simplified and flexible procedures. This is particularly relevant in situations where the EU faces persistent difficulty reaching out to specific groups of civil society actors.

The EU should improve its data management tools and M&E mechanisms, to better assess progress in strengthening support to civil society and outreach through FSTP. Specifically, this would require additional functionalities in OPSYS as well as enhanced commitment of NEAR management to monitoring and reporting on targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society.

The EU should continue to promote the strategy of mainstreaming of civil society support, and strengthen its institutional knowledge and capacity on how to put this strategy into practice by sharing experience and lessons learned between countries and regions.

Résumé analytique

Objectif, portée et contexte de l'évaluation

Cette évaluation contribue à la responsabilisation, l'apprentissage, la capitalisation et l'amélioration des politiques et des pratiques de l'engagement de l'Union Européenne (UE) vis-à-vis de la société civile dans les régions de l'élargissement et du voisinage ainsi qu'en Russie sur la période de 2007 à 2018. L'évaluation porte sur :

- **un soutien financier ciblé (*targeted support*)**, lorsque les actions visent à renforcer la participation de la société civile ;
- **un soutien intégré (*mainstreamed support*)**, à savoir un soutien à la société civile, comme partenaires opérationnels, dans le cadre de la coopération sectorielle de l'UE, et un soutien dans les efforts non financiers de l'UE pour promouvoir l'intégration des organisations de la société civile (OSC) dans le dialogue politique sectoriel ;
- **un engagement politique avec la société civile**, grâce par exemple au dialogue politique, à des forums multipartites et à des concertations impliquant les organisations de la société civile, dans les zones non couvertes par l'intégration (ci-dessus).

Le périmètre géographique de l'évaluation comprend :

- **La région de l'élargissement (c.-à-d. les candidats et les candidats potentiels)** : Albanie, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Kosovo*, Macédoine du Nord, Monténégro, Serbie, Turquie ;
- **Les pays du Voisinage Est ou oriental** : Arménie, Azerbaïdjan, Biélorussie, Géorgie, Moldavie, Ukraine ;
- **Les pays du Voisinage Sud ou méridional** : Algérie, Égypte, Israël, Jordanie, Liban, Libye, Maroc, Palestine**, Syrie, Tunisie ;
- **La Fédération de Russie.**

Approche méthodologique globale

L'évaluation a été conduite entre juillet 2018 et mars 2020 par une équipe d'experts confirmés en évaluation possédant de l'expérience dans le domaine de la société civile et une connaissance approfondie des régions couvertes par l'évaluation. Elle comporte quatre phases clés : 1) une phase initiale ; 2) une phase administrative ; 3) une phase de terrain ; et 4) une phase de synthèse et de rapport.

Une approche théorique a été retenue comme méthode d'évaluation, sur la base d'une série de logiques d'intervention reconstruites, une pour chaque sous-région. Les logiques d'intervention reconstruites sont un outil d'évaluation utilisé pour comprendre le parcours « prévu », les résultats et l'impact éventuel du soutien de l'UE à la société civile. Ils fournissent une trame sur laquelle les principales questions d'évaluation sont définies pour observer dans quelle mesure les facteurs, les influences et les processus clés ont contribué ou entravé la réalisation des résultats. Cet outil identifie également tous les résultats positifs ou négatifs imprévus.

L'équipe en charge de l'évaluation a créé un inventaire des actions de l'UE, qu'elle a classées par type de soutien - ciblé ou intégré - à la société civile. Un échantillon d'actions et d'initiatives non financières a été sélectionné pour l'examen de la documentation et l'entrevue. Pour des raisons de sécurité, aucun sondage n'a été réalisé avec des parties prenantes basées en Russie. Deux enquêtes en ligne (une pour le personnel de l'UE basé dans les Délégations de l'Union Européenne (DUE) ou à Bruxelles, responsable de la surveillance de l'engagement de la société civile dans les régions couvertes par l'évaluation, et une pour les participants de la société civile) ont été conçues pour atteindre les participants se trouvant dans les régions couvertes par l'évaluation. La revue documentaire incluait les documents tels que les plans d'action, les appels à propositions, les décisions de financement, les documents de stratégie par pays, les cadres uniques d'appui, les feuilles de

* Cette désignation est sans préjudice des positions concernant son statut et est conforme à la résolution 1244 (1999) du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies ainsi qu'à l'avis de la Cour internationale de justice (CIJ) sur la déclaration d'indépendance du Kosovo.

** Cette désignation ne doit pas être interprétée comme une reconnaissance de l'État de Palestine et est sans préjudice des positions individuelles des États membres sur cette question.

route sur l'engagement envers la société civile, les études et les évaluations thématiques ainsi que du matériel de formation et d'information pour le personnel de l'UE. Les missions sur le terrain au cours desquelles des entretiens ont été menés avec le personnel de l'UE et des représentants des OSC (bénéficiaires des subventions) ont été conduites dans toutes les régions ciblées couvertes par l'évaluationⁱⁱⁱ sauf la Russie. Parmi les parties prenantes consultées pour l'évaluation se trouvent les participants aux événements régionaux de la société civile et le personnel du siège de la Commission européenne (CE) à Bruxelles.

Aperçu des fonds contractés pour des actions en faveur de la société civile

En dressant un inventaire de l'aide en faveur de la société civile, les évaluateurs ont voulu essayer de quantifier l'aide financière fournie par l'UE à la société civile et différencier le soutien « ciblé » (*targeted support*) du soutien « intégré » (*mainstreamed support*). Dans le but d'obtenir l'image la plus précise possible de la situation, l'analyse s'est concentrée uniquement sur les dernières années (2013-2018). Au cours de cette période, l'UE a fourni environ 250 millions d'euros chaque année, tout type de soutien confondu. Ce chiffre représente **7 % des fonds totaux de l'UE** contractés pour l'action extérieure dans les régions couvertes par la présente évaluation. L'importance relative des soutiens ciblés et intégrés dans le portefeuille d'actions cofinancées par l'UE et mises en œuvre par les OSC était similaire dans les régions de l'élargissement et dans les pays des Voisinages Est et Sud.

Dans les régions de l'élargissement, le soutien ciblé et intégré représentait environ 5 % des fonds européens alloués à ces pays de 2013 à 2018 : 9 % dans les Balkans occidentaux et 1 % en Turquie, où l'environnement est de plus en plus délicat pour les OSC. Cependant, aucun engagement précis en faveur de la société civile n'est fléchi dans le programme géographique.

Dans le voisinage oriental, la plupart des cadres uniques d'appui de niveau national affectent 5 % des fonds à la société civile. L'UE a atteint ce niveau de financement dans la plupart des pays, grâce à une combinaison de dépenses de programmes géographiques et thématiques.

Dans le voisinage Sud, la plupart des cadres uniques d'appui au niveau national affectent 5 % des fonds à la société civile. Plusieurs pays (Algérie, Égypte, Maroc) englobent le soutien à la société civile dans une catégorie plus générale de développement des capacités pour les parties prenantes des pays partenaires. L'UE a atteint ce niveau de financement dans la plupart des pays, grâce à une combinaison de dépenses de programmes géographiques et thématiques. La plupart des fonds alloués pour soutenir la société civile proviennent davantage d'un soutien intégré que d'un soutien ciblé.

Les instruments géographiques fournissent plus de 80 % des fonds européens alloués aux soutiens ciblés et intégrés. Le reste provient essentiellement des instruments thématiques tels que l'IEDDH (Instrument Européen pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme), et l'instrument OSC-AL (Organisation de la Société Civile - Autorités Locales).

Alors que le volume des fonds alloués en tant que soutien ciblé ou intégré à la société civile est resté stable au cours des cinq dernières années, il y a un net contraste avec l'augmentation significative des fonds alloués pour le reste de la coopération européenne dans les pays couverts par la présente évaluation. Entre 2013 et 2018, le volume contractuel du soutien ciblé et intégré aux OSC a diminué de 20 %, tandis que le volume contractuel des autres types de soutien opérationnel de l'UE a augmenté de 57 %.

Principales constatations et conclusions

Pertinence : l'environnement opérationnel et institutionnel de la société civile varie naturellement d'un pays à l'autre, et pourtant il existe des éléments structurels communs dans les contextes politiques de chacune des trois principales régions de cette évaluation qui ont guidé les objectifs et l'approche stratégique de l'UE pour soutenir la société civile. Dans la région de l'élargissement, la procédure d'adhésion à l'UE a défini l'orientation et la nature du soutien de l'UE. Le principal instrument financier, l'instrument d'aide de préadhésion (IAP), a renforcé et systématisé la participation de la société civile dans sa programmation et sa mise en œuvre. Là où l'environnement pour la société civile est devenu moins favorable, par exemple en Turquie, en Serbie et en Bosnie-Herzégovine, l'UE a ajusté son approche en conséquence. Cela a également été le cas dans le voisinage Sud où l'UE s'est adaptée aux changements majeurs en soutenant les processus démocratiques, ainsi que dans le voisinage Est et en Russie, où l'UE a continué de trouver des mécanismes pour soutenir la

ⁱⁱⁱ Des missions ont été menées en Bosnie-Herzégovine, au Maroc, en Israël, en Palestine, en Arménie, au Bélarus, en Géorgie et en Ukraine.

société civile même lorsque le champ d'action s'est réduit au cours la période de l'évaluation. Par exemple, le soutien à l'engagement des OSC sur des thèmes non controversés et l'intégration de la société civile dans les secteurs non controversés de la coopération de l'UE peuvent conférer une légitimité et un soutien aux OSC même lorsque leur champ d'action pour participer aux processus démocratiques est restreint. Les Feuilles de route sur l'engagement envers la société civile (pays du Voisinage) ont été largement acceptées comme outil pour l'analyse conjointe et l'élaboration de priorités communes.

Dans ce contexte, l'UE a cherché à comprendre et à mieux répondre aux besoins de la société civile grâce à des processus de consultation plus systématiques, qui alimentent la conception et la mise en œuvre d'un soutien ciblé et facilitent l'engagement de la société civile dans le dialogue politique. Si de nombreux cas de participation positive de la société civile dans le dialogue autour des politiques publiques sont observés, il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour atteindre un niveau significatif de pluralisme de la représentation de la société civile, et assurer un suivi pour rendre le dialogue moins ponctuel.

L'UE a développé divers mécanismes pour apporter un soutien à la société civile. Avoir ce choix d'options à sa disposition lui a permis de répondre de façon plus appropriée à la diversité du secteur de la société civile, qui inclue aussi bien les petites organisations opérant au niveau local que les grandes organisations internationales. Dans toutes les régions, le soutien financier à des tiers est considéré comme l'un des nouveaux moyens les plus efficaces d'étendre le soutien de l'UE à la société civile. Le nombre important d'actions mises en œuvre par les OSC (27 % du nombre total de contrats de soutien opérationnel aux régions de la présente évaluation) permet à l'UE de traiter un large éventail de problèmes spécifiques, de répondre rapidement aux problèmes émergents et de soutenir un éventail d'initiatives innovantes et pilotes.

Les OSC interrogées durant l'évaluation perçoivent le bien-fondé du soutien de l'UE à la société civile de façon plutôt positive, voire très positive. En fait, les observations critiques sur les questions de politique rapportées aux évaluateurs concernaient presque exclusivement des incohérences apparentes, ou des points sur lesquels les parties prenantes considéraient que l'UE devrait être plus cohérente et encore plus en adéquation avec la poursuite des trois priorités de la communication de 2012 de la Commission européenne « Les racines de la démocratie et du développement durable : Les engagements de l'Europe avec la société civile dans les relations extérieures » (2012), qui sont les suivantes : (1) intensifier les efforts pour promouvoir un environnement propice pour les OSC dans les pays partenaires ; (2) promouvoir une participation significative et structurée des OSC aux politiques intérieures des pays partenaires, au cycle de programmation de l'UE et aux processus internationaux ; et (3) accroître la capacité des OSC locales à assumer leur rôle d'acteurs du développement indépendants de façon plus efficace. Il n'y a pas de parties prenantes ni de groupe de parties prenantes significatifs dans les régions couvertes par l'évaluation qui ne proposent une réduction du soutien de l'UE ou même une approche sensiblement différente.

Efficience : le soutien ciblé et intégré à la société civile représente 27 % des contrats d'aide opérationnelle aux régions couvertes par la présente évaluation. Cela implique un engagement en temps considérable du personnel de l'UE, particulièrement au niveau des Délégations de l'UE (DUE). Dans un contexte de ressources humaines limitées, la gestion d'un grand nombre de petits contrats avec les OSC continue de représenter un défi non négligeable en matière d'efficience. Bien que ce critère rentre en ligne de compte dans les choix des DUE concernant les instruments et les mécanismes les plus appropriés à déployer, d'autres facteurs tels que la pertinence de la couverture thématique/des bénéficiaires cibles et la disponibilité des fonds sont également des éléments clés. Le mécanisme du soutien financier à des tiers est de plus en plus considéré comme un moyen efficace d'atteindre les OSC locales. Cependant, un certain nombre d'effets inattendus du soutien financier à des tiers peuvent être observés : bien que le soutien fourni par le biais des programmes de subventions soit plus efficace au niveau de la DUE, il ne permet pas d'assurer aux DUE une bonne visibilité sur les organisations bénéficiaires finales. De plus, il favorise les OSC internationales plus importantes ayant la capacité organisationnelle d'administrer les programmes de subventions. Les OSC nationales de niveau moyen peuvent être exclues, car elles sont trop grandes pour participer en tant que sous-bénéficiaires mais manquent de capacité pour participer en tant qu'organisations directrices. D'un autre côté, les soutiens intégrés à la société civile sont un moyen efficace et prometteur pour étendre et systématiser le soutien à la société civile. Ils sont encouragés par l'UE. Cependant, les dispositifs actuels de l'UE sont inadaptés pour mesurer l'efficience de cette approche.

Efficacité : l'engagement de l'UE auprès de la société civile a été très efficace pour renforcer son rôle dans les processus de dialogue politique, tels que les consultations politiques, ses réseaux et ses forums nationaux et régionaux. Cependant, l'efficacité du soutien financier ciblé a parfois été critiquée, le poids des procédures de l'UE étant considéré comme prépondérant. Les règles et les procédures associées à la candidature et à la mise en œuvre d'actions en réponse aux appels à propositions, telles que les procédures concurrentielles, les subventions ponctuelles et le manque de possibilités d'extension, n'encouragent pas le type de renforcement des capacités à long terme dont les OSC ont besoin pour devenir « professionnalisées ». Comme indiqué, l'UE a largement utilisé le soutien financier à des tiers pour étendre son soutien aux OSC locales plus petites n'ayant

pas la capacité organisationnelle de demander de façon indépendante un soutien de l'UE en réponse aux appels à propositions réguliers. Cependant, l'accent est mis à présent sur la coopération sur les thèmes de la bonne gouvernance, des droits de l'homme et d'égalité des sexes, avec une moindre utilisation dans d'autres secteurs de coopération. L'analyse quantitative réalisée par cette évaluation a montré qu'un soutien important est fourni en raison du soutien intégré de l'UE. Cette dernière est une stratégie de plus en plus encouragée par la CE comme un moyen d'intégrer systématiquement la société civile dans tous les domaines de coopération, comme cela s'est produit en particulier dans le voisinage Sud pendant de nombreuses années. Cependant, les résultats de cette même évaluation suggèrent également que, même si l'intégration est de toute évidence répandue, le concept n'est toutefois pas largement et systématiquement compris par les DUE. Comme mentionné auparavant, il y a actuellement un manque d'outils appropriés de suivi et d'évaluation (S&E) permettant de déterminer si l'intégration est un moyen efficace de soutenir la société civile.

À l'heure actuelle, les dispositifs de l'UE ne reflètent pas et ne rendent pas compte efficacement de la quantité et de la qualité du soutien apporté à tous les niveaux de la société civile. Une grande partie des actions mises en œuvre par les OSC sont classées comme soutien à la gouvernance et à la société civile au lieu d'utiliser les codes sectoriels CAD alloués aux actions mises en œuvre par d'autres types d'organisations. De plus, l'évaluation n'a pas identifié d'outils de suivi ou de systèmes d'information européens efficaces identifiant par exemple, dans les pays partenaires voisins, la divergence entre les engagements indicatifs envers la société civile dans les cadres uniques d'appui (SSF) et les fonds réels engagés dans les décisions de financement (FD) ou, dans les régions du voisinage et de l'élargissement, les volumes et la distribution thématique de l'aide ciblée et intégrée. Le système de gestion de données OPSYS^{iv} de l'UE n'enregistre pas les bénéficiaires du soutien financier à des tiers ni ne permet le regroupement des données selon le montant des subventions ou le nombre de bénéficiaires.

Impact : les impacts à long terme de l'engagement de l'UE envers la société civile varient selon les régions de la présente évaluation, ce qui reflète les objectifs politiques divergents qui ont régi le soutien à son voisinage et aux régions et partenaires de l'élargissement. Dans le voisinage Sud, l'approche intégrée de l'UE, qui s'est adaptée aux changements politiques importants au fil du temps, a contribué à la « professionnalisation » des OSC, leur permettant d'agir de manière indépendante et crédible pour répondre à un grand nombre d'intérêts de la société civile. Ces OSC ont été particulièrement efficaces lorsqu'elles ont bénéficié d'un soutien à long terme combiné à des opportunités de sensibilisation et de dialogue politique. Dans les régions de l'élargissement, l'adhésion à l'UE a fourni un cadre pour l'engagement de la société civile, et l'UE a fortement encouragé et soutenu la société civile en tant que partie intégrante de l'instrument IAP, assurant un rôle actif dans le processus d'élargissement. Dans le même temps, l'UE a encouragé les gouvernements à mettre en place une législation et une politique visant à améliorer la reconnaissance de la société civile par le gouvernement et à renforcer leur coopération, même si ces dernières ne sont pas encore suffisamment établies pour assurer une durabilité à long terme, comme la situation en Turquie l'illustre. Dans le voisinage oriental, l'engagement de l'UE auprès de la société civile a considérablement contribué à accroître la capacité des organisations de celle-ci. Cela a été particulièrement marquant dans le domaine des consultations et du dialogue politiques, tant au niveau national que bilatéral et international, où les compétences des OSC ont augmenté de manière générale. L'approche structurée de l'UE d'implication des OSC dans l'élaboration des politiques a contribué à accroître la visibilité et l'importance de la société civile dans les dialogues politiques dans la plupart des pays du partenariat oriental.

Durabilité : il y a eu une augmentation graduelle de la durabilité de la société civile sur la période couverte par la présente évaluation. L'UE a contribué à atténuer les évolutions négatives concernant l'environnement politique et institutionnel et a contribué à aider les OSC à s'adapter. De légères améliorations pouvant être associées au soutien de l'UE aux OSC et aux gouvernements des pays partenaires ont eu lieu dans certains pays. L'évaluation n'a pas identifié d'améliorations majeures dans la viabilité financière des bénéficiaires de subventions des OSC au cours de la période couverte par la présente évaluation. Les stratégies et les directives de l'UE expriment de plus en plus une conception large du développement des capacités, dépassant le cadre de la capacité de demande de subvention. Cependant, cette évaluation n'a pas trouvé de preuve évidente d'une diversification correspondante du soutien pour le renforcement des capacités. Malgré des investissements importants et durables dans le développement des capacités de la société civile, l'UE continue de traiter avec des OSC largement tributaire des donateurs. La procédure d'attribution des subventions concurrentielle ne permet pas à l'UE d'offrir une deuxième phase de financement aux bénéficiaires de subventions retenus par le biais d'attributions directes, mais certaines OSC reçoivent néanmoins un financement complémentaire dans le cadre de telles procédures. Les thèmes et le calendrier des appels à proposition varient, et la sélection et les contrats de subventions peuvent prendre beaucoup de temps. Dans ce contexte, de nombreuses OSC démobilisent le personnel professionnel ou passent d'un thème à l'autre pour s'adapter à la disponibilité des

^{iv} OPSYS est une plateforme informatique en cours de développement par les services de la Commission pour gérer efficacement l'ensemble du portefeuille d'interventions des relations extérieures de l'UE.

fonds. L'UE continue de fournir un soutien important au développement des capacités dans le but d'améliorer l'aptitude des candidats à présenter une demande de subvention unique et compétitive, avec un investissement plutôt moindre dans le soutien au développement des capacités qui pourrait aider les OSC à diversifier leurs rentrées d'argent et à développer la mobilisation des ressources locales.

Coordination, complémentarité et cohérence : l'UE a engagé des efforts considérables dans la promotion de la coordination avec les États membres (EM) et les donateurs de même sensibilité. Ces donateurs ont participé activement à l'élaboration de la programmation conjointe européenne coordonnée par les DUE, aux Lignes directrices pour la société civile (candidats pour l'élargissement et candidats potentiels) et aux Feuilles de route sur l'engagement envers la société civile (pays du voisinage). La cohérence et la complémentarité ont dans l'ensemble été améliorées, même si la coopération des États membres dans certains pays du voisinage Sud est toujours affectée par des évaluations politiques et des priorités divergentes des services de l'UE et des États membres.

Valeur ajoutée de l'UE : l'UE a maintenu sa présence en tant que principal donateur de la société civile dans tous les pays couverts par la présente évaluation à une époque où de nombreux États membres, donateurs, fondations privées et OSC internationales ont réduit l'octroi de subvention. Dans la transition vers une programmation conjointe, de nombreux États membres de l'UE ont réduit leur soutien à la société civile, en particulier sur les thèmes de l'environnement favorable et du développement des capacités, qui sont au cœur de l'engagement de l'UE dans tous les pays. Ils ont également ajusté progressivement leur soutien pour rechercher une complémentarité avec les initiatives européennes.

Dans les Balkans occidentaux, en Turquie, en Moldavie, en Ukraine et en Géorgie, les changements auxquels l'UE a contribué n'auraient pas pu se produire en son absence. Dans le voisinage Sud, la Biélorussie, l'Azerbaïdjan et l'Arménie, les changements auxquels l'UE a contribué auraient pu se produire sans son soutien, mais auraient été plus longs et auraient eu moins de chances de succès, et d'autres donateurs n'auraient pas apporté leur soutien de manière aussi importante si l'UE avait retiré son soutien. Dans la région de l'élargissement, l'UE tire parti avec succès des aspects politiques et opérationnels du renforcement mutuel ; les États membres et les donateurs de même sensibilité n'auraient pas eu la même influence. Cette dynamique se retrouve également dans les pays du voisinage, mais les mesures d'incitations de l'UE sont moindres et ne bénéficient pas d'un soutien aussi répandu que pour celui apporté aux candidats à l'élargissement et les candidats potentiels.

Principales recommandations

L'UE devrait renforcer son contrôle pour traduire les engagements politiques envers la société civile en une programmation efficace. Cela concerne en particulier le faible alignement entre l'affectation des fonds et les fonds ciblés et intégrés réellement contractés, et les progrès en matière d'intégration de la société civile dans la coopération sectorielle. L'UE pourrait envisager d'affecter à la société civile une certaine partie des fonds bilatéraux alloués aux candidats à l'élargissement et aux candidats potentiels, comme elle le fait déjà dans le SSF pour les pays du voisinage.

Les DUE des régions de l'élargissement et du voisinage devraient envisager d'autoriser le soutien financier à des tiers dans un plus grand nombre d'appels à propositions, étendant l'utilisation de ce mécanisme au-delà des modules thématiques où il se concentre actuellement : la gouvernance, les droits de l'homme et l'égalité des sexes. Cela faciliterait l'engagement d'un plus grand nombre et d'un plus large éventail d'acteurs de la société civile. Cela pourrait contribuer à une participation plus locale et plus diversifiée sur le plan géographique, ainsi qu'à l'engagement d'acteurs spécialisés.

La DG NEAR devrait envisager d'encourager les bénéficiaires de subventions à utiliser le mécanisme du soutien financier à des tiers comme objectif principal d'action. Cela permettrait aux fondations existantes et aux OSC subventionnaires de fournir un grand nombre de petites subventions en utilisant des procédures simplifiées et flexibles. Cela est particulièrement approprié dans les situations où l'UE rencontre des difficultés persistantes pour atteindre des groupes spécifiques d'acteurs de la société civile.

L'UE devrait améliorer ses outils de gestion de données et ses mécanismes de S&E pour mieux évaluer les progrès réalisés dans le renforcement du soutien à la société civile par le biais du soutien financier à des tiers. Plus précisément, cela nécessiterait des fonctionnalités supplémentaires dans OPSYS, ainsi qu'un engagement accru de la direction de la DG NEAR à surveiller et à rendre compte de l'appui ciblé et intégré à la société civile.

L'UE devrait continuer de promouvoir la stratégie d'intégration (*mainstreaming*) de soutien à la société civile et de renforcer ses connaissances et capacités institutionnelles sur la manière de mettre en œuvre cette stratégie en partageant l'expérience et les enseignements tirés entre les pays et les régions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives and scope of the evaluation

This is a thematic evaluation which focuses on a range of strategic-level issues pertaining to the nature of EU support to, and engagement with, civil society in this region.

The legal scope relating to the definition of civil society that guided this evaluation is the one that is stated in the European Commission's 2012 Communication: 'The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations' (2012).

Box 1: EC definition of civil society: *'all non-state, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations. These include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs. Among them, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, foundations, research institutions, gender and LGBT organisations, cooperatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media. Trade unions and employers' organisations, the so-called social partners, constitute a specific category of CSOs.'*

The purpose of the evaluation, as expressed in the Terms of Reference, is threefold: it encompasses the need to demonstrate accountability, promote learning and improve policy and practice in relation to the EU's engagement with civil society in the Eastern Neighbourhood region (also referred to in this report as the Eastern Partnership region), the Enlargement region, the Southern Neighbourhood region and Russia, between 2007 and 2018. In essence, the evaluation's objectives have been:

- to identify the key results that have been achieved through the engagement; and assess them in relation to the intended purpose of the support, taking into account those factors, which may have either negatively or positively influenced such results;
- establish the extent to which strategic aims were translated in practice;
- provide evidence-based recommendations that can inform future policy and programming, including for the Multi-annual Financial Framework (2014-2020 and subsequently).

The thematic scope of the evaluation concerns the range of ways in which the EU has supported and engaged with civil society in these regions, over this period.

- **Targeted financial support:** In the period 2007-2013 this was provided through geographical instruments, including the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and thematic instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development (NSA-LA); in the period 2014-2018 it was provided through geographical instruments such as the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and thematic instruments (EIDHR and Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities (CSO-LA)) under the Development Co-operation instrument (DCI). Support has also been provided through other thematic instruments, including the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the MEDA instrument.
- **Mainstreamed support**, i.e. operational support to civil society within EU sectoral cooperation (e.g. health, rule of law, budget support, etc.) financed from the bilateral cooperation envelope and from the above thematic programmes, as well as policy (non-financial) efforts of the EU to promote the inclusion of CSOs into sectoral dialogue at country level, including in the identification and assessment of EU sectoral cooperation itself.
- **Policy-level engagement with civil society**, e.g. through policy dialogue, multi-stakeholder fora, consultations involving civil society organisations.

The evaluation covers all modalities of financial support, as well as non-financed activities implemented in line with the support to and engagement with civil society.

The temporal scope of the evaluation is from 2007 to 2018. This period contains sub-periods defined by the EU's engagement with, and support to, civil society (2007-12; 2012-18) as stated in the Terms of Reference.

The geographical scope of the evaluation covers:

- **IPA beneficiaries:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey;
- **ENPI/ENI East:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine;
- **ENPI/ENI South:** Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia;
- The Russian Federation.

1.2. Purpose and structure of the final report

This report (**Volume I**) provides a synthesis of the evaluation's key findings covering all the sub-regions evaluated. It consists of the following sections: 1) introduction; 2) an overview of the methodology followed by the evaluation team, including limitations; 3) context and background on the development of the EU's engagement with civil society in each region; 4) overview of the implementation of civil society in figures; 5) key findings in response to each of the evaluation questions (EQs). Sections 6 and 7 contain the conclusions and recommendations.

In addition, a series of annexes present, in **Volume II**: the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation (Annex 1); detailed findings for each sub-region, summarised by Evaluation Question (EQ) and Judgement Criteria (JC) (Annex 2) as well as a full evaluation matrix with all findings for all indicators, for each sub-region (Annex 3).

In **Volume III**: an inventory of EU support to civil society across all regions during the last five years of the evaluation period (2013-2018) (Annex 4).

In **Volume IV**: details on the methodology (Annex 5), the policy background for each region, and reconstructed intervention logics for each region (Annex 6); stakeholders interviewed (Annex 7); a list of documents consulted (Annex 8); an overview of the survey response (Annex 9); a list of sampled interventions (Annex 10) and the stakeholder mapping that was used to inform the consultation strategy (Annex 11); and a list of Calls for Proposals analysed as part of Section 4 (Annex 12).

The annexes are contained in four separate volumes (as indicated in the table of contents).

2. Methodology for the evaluation

2.1. Overall approach

The evaluation work was structured and organised according to the three main regions of the evaluation, with a more limited assessment of the EU's engagement with Russia. For each regional component of the evaluation, a senior expert with thematic experience in civil society and strategic evaluation experience was assigned the role of leading the evaluation in their respective sub-areas. This team of senior experts was led by a Team Leader, who was responsible for the overall evaluation design and conduct of the research and analysis tasks, and the team was supported by junior research staff and a Project Manager.

The evaluation was conducted from July 2018 to March 2020 and consisted of four key phases: i) inception phase; ii) desk phase; iii) field phase; and iv) synthesis and reporting phase. In the case of the Neighbourhood East, the Terms of Reference required the document review and fieldwork tasks to be combined into a single phase, culminating in a regional report, to be later synthesised with the desk and field phase findings for the Enlargement and Neighbourhood South regions. In the case of Russia, no field phase took place.

The evaluation methodology adopted a theory-based approach, guided by a series of reconstructed intervention logics (ILs), one for each sub-region. The ILs represent an evaluation tool, used to understand the 'intended' route, outcomes and eventual impact of the EU's support to civil society. They provide a framework on which key evaluation questions are mapped, in order to observe the extent to which key factors, influences and processes have either contributed to, or hindered the achievement of results, as well as identifying any unintended positive or negative outcomes.

Table 1 Evaluation questions

Evaluation criteria ¹	Evaluation question (addressed by each sub-region)
1. Relevance	To what extent have the EU's objectives and approaches to its engagement (policy dialogue and financial support) with civil society properly addressed the variety of problems faced by / needs of civil society actors over the evaluation period?
2. Efficiency	To what extent has the scale of resources deployed been justified considering the changes/results produced? To what extent have efficiency gains, or losses, occurred?
3. Effectiveness	What have been the effects of the EU's various forms of engagement with civil society?
4. Impact	To what extent have the EU's various forms of engagement with civil society contributed to the enhancement of participatory and inclusive democratic governance?
5. Sustainability and ownership	To what extent have the changes to which EU support have contributed proved to be sustainable after the end of EU funding?
6. Impact	To what extent have the various forms of EU engagement (including policy dialogue and financial support) with civil society been effectively coordinated, complementary, and coherent with the activities of EU MS and other donors?
7. Coordination, complementarity and coherence	To what extent have the various forms of the EU's engagement with civil society over the evaluation period had characteristics that distinguished it from that of other actors?
8. EU added value	To what extent could changes, which the EU contributed to, have happened in its absence?

¹ following the standard OECD/DAC and EU-specific criteria

2.2. Key stages of the methodological approach

Inventory of civil society interventions: during the inception phase, the evaluation team established an inventory of EC contracts for which the main objective of the action was support to civil society. This followed a methodology that was described in the inception report. An initial inventory was developed during the inception phase, according to the methodology approved in the inception report. It was subsequently realised that the inventory did not cover the full period required, and that a significant number of relevant actions were omitted. Therefore, a revised and complete inventory was developed and submitted to the EU in August 2019, also included in this report (Annex 4).

Sampling: in order to identify project examples for further analysis, a sample of interventions for all three forms of support was identified, according to the methodology approved in the inception report. The sample of EU activities selected for closer analysis followed an indicative ratio of 60% targeted support, 20% mainstreamed support and 20% policy engagement activities. The samples formed on this basis are presented in Annex 10.

2.3. Data collection and analysis methods

The evaluation employed mixed methods in gathering and analysing the evidence in response to each evaluation question. To organise the process, an evaluation matrix was developed, detailing, for each EQ, the specific indicators on which data would be collected and assessed, and the judgement criteria around which hypotheses would be formed and tested in the field. For each indicator, a combination of primary and secondary data sources were used to gather evidence, including both quantitative and qualitative information. A range of methods were used to collect data and, later, triangulate evidence for each EQ response.

- **Document review:** the literature review examined policy, programming and implementation-level documentation relating to the samples (e.g. Descriptions of Action, Terms of Reference, and to a lesser extent monitoring reports, evaluation reports, and final reports), as well as other secondary sources collected (e.g. thematic or regional evaluation reports, studies, etc.). For the Enlargement region, Neighbourhood South and Russia, the documentary review was carried out in the initial months of the evaluation and presented in the Progress Report submitted in March 2019. The ToR for the evaluation envisaged a Regional Report for the Eastern Neighbourhood region to be developed through a field phase commencing immediately after the inception phase and did not make provision for an intermediate desk phase during which time an extensive desk review would ordinarily take place. The review of secondary material for the Neighbourhood East region was, therefore, undertaken on an ongoing basis, commencing during the inception phase and continuing through to the synthesis phase.
- **Semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews:** the evaluation team (ET) developed the consultation strategy based on the mapping of stakeholder groups to be engaged in the evaluation process. Interviews and one focus group were conducted remotely and in-country during missions to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Morocco, Israel, Palestine, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as with a range of Brussels-based respondents from the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Parliament. More than 200 stakeholders were consulted over the course of the evaluation, during key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in technical discussions. As indicated above, field visits were conducted in all regions except Russia. The selection of countries to be visited were based on consultations with the EU.
- **Qualitative surveys:** two surveys (one for EU staff responsible for the oversight of civil society engagement in the regions covered in the evaluation, based either in EUDs or in Brussels, and one for civil society respondents) were designed to extend the outreach to respondents across the regions covered in the evaluation. The civil society survey was available in English, French, Arabic, Serbo-Croat and Russian. The EU staff survey was available in English and French. A total of 293 responses were collected through the survey of civil society representatives; and 18 responses were collected through the EUD staff survey. 15 responses were received from staff of EU Delegations, and 3 responses were received from staff based in DG NEAR. The majority (13) of responses were from programme managers. A full breakdown of the survey response is provided in Annex 9; results of the survey are incorporated into Annexes 2 and 3.

Upon completion of the field visits, the ET reviewed interview evidence from interviews and conducted a follow-up desk review of all documents received during field missions, including additional sample documentation, national-level evaluations and others. Furthermore, the ET analysed preliminary survey results (survey remained open until late February 2019). Finally, the ET compiled the findings from all sources per indicator and judgement criterion. The ET came together in September 2019 for a final findings review meeting.

2.4. Methodological challenges and limitations

Confidentiality: additional security measures needed to be taken while interviewing beneficiaries in countries with shrinking spaces for civil society. This included hosting some interviews on EUD premises as well as some communication via encrypted channels including ProtonMail and Signal.

Participation from stakeholders: in the absence of secure communications at EUD Belarus, some documents were obtained in person in hard copy. Staff rotation was addressed to the extent possible through additional interviews with former staff members. The limited response to the survey and, in some cases, invitations for key informant interviews meant that opinions sought to shed light on the experience of EC and other stakeholders were sometimes lacking, thus limiting the richness of the eventual data. Some EU staff were reluctant to meet with the evaluators, often commenting that they received a large number of consultants and/or did not have new information to provide to the evaluators (whom they had often met in the framework of earlier assignments).

Sample limitations: the sample of actions and policy initiatives initially selected for document analysis and interviews proved to be too small to provide a comprehensive or representative picture of EU performance. The evaluation team compensated for this by expanding quantitative analysis to cover all actions identified as targeted or mainstreamed support. However, this occurred towards the end of the evaluation, and did not lead to further interviews with beneficiaries or analysis of action-level documents. Nevertheless, the sample provided an additional resource that was able to enrich the evaluation in terms of how individual interventions complement other efforts towards a more holistic approach to EU engagement.

Data comparability across regions: in relation to the Eastern Neighbourhood, the quantity of data and depth of analysis was not comparable to the Neighbourhood South and the Enlargement regions. This was partly due to the fact that previous evaluations of civil society in those regions had already been carried out in the past, thus providing a base level of analysis to inform further research, and the fact that the ToR required the desk and field phases for the East to be run in parallel, as required by the ToR. The evaluation team addressed this imbalance through a more comprehensive field phase for the Eastern Partnership countries and additional support for document review. They also revisited stakeholders at a later stage of the evaluation to validate new findings that emerged. Where common findings are possible, these are presented in this synthetic report whilst some findings are necessarily region-specific.

Completeness of data on financial support: data analysed for Section 4 covers the period from 2013-2018, as this is the period for which complete data was available. While this does not cover the entire evaluation period, it has allowed the evaluation team to examine trends over a more recent five-year period.

Challenging of separating targeted and mainstreamed support: current systems within DG NEAR do not allow for an effective methodology for distinguishing between actions representing targeted and/or mainstreamed support. The DAC sector code encoded in CRIS by EU staff is not a reliable indicator, because a significant proportion of actions implemented by CSOs are encoded with a DAC code for civil society and governance, irrespective of the main sector in which the action takes place. The evaluation team resolved this challenge by classifying actions as targeted or mainstreamed, based on the thematic focus of the Financial Decision (FD) (where available) or the action title (in about 1,000 cases where the FD could not be identified). FDs and related actions with a main focus on strengthening civil society were classified as **targeted**. This includes all actions contracted via civil society support programmes. Other FD and actions, which had some other main focus, and where civil society was engaged as an implementing partner, were classified as **mainstreaming**.

3. Evolution of EU support to civil society

3.1. The international framework and commitments

This section presents an overview of the contexts in which EU engagement with civil society has been undertaken in the period covered by the evaluation, followed by a summary of the ways in which this engagement has been pursued, along with commentary regarding the implications for the evaluation task. This aggregate-level summary is supplemented by region-specific presentations in Annex 6 of this report, in which the narrative summaries of the reconstructed intervention logics for each region are provided.

The period covered by the evaluation has seen considerable ‘turbulence’ in the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of the regions covered in the evaluation. They have seen concurrent and complex events and processes, some of which are interrelated, and some of which are independent of one another, including regime change, new and protracted armed conflict, and mass internal and transnational migration. Such events have been set within a context in which there has been an ongoing trend for the opening up of democratic and societal freedoms in some contexts, and yet an increase in the adoption of authoritarian practices in the restriction of civil liberties and the role of civil society in others. These trends, to varying degrees, have been spread across the regions in question.

Alongside such challenges, the role played by civil society organisations and actors in the political process and in addressing societal concerns has at times been challenged by governments and the mass media, which has served to impact negatively on the level of trust towards CSOs among the population at large. This can compound the financial difficulties faced by civil society at times. Overall, the capacity of CSOs to perform effective roles in oversight of public policy and societal developments continues to suffer from limitations across these regions.

The trends are not ‘linear’ – progress towards and away from democratic practices and an enabling environment for civil society has ebbed and flowed during this period. There has been, for instance, substantial discussion of the ‘shrinking space’ in which civil society organisations and actors have to operate in these regions, as a result of such developments as the introduction of legislation that is restrictive towards CSOs. At the same time, and in response, new ways to forge space have been developed by CSOs, e.g. through increased use of social media, transnational activism, etc.

The role of external influences on civil society – both emanating from the EU and the international donor community through open engagement and support for civil society actors, and from other sources that aim to counteract such support and developments – has also become prominent during this period.

It is against the contexts noted above that the EU response to engaging with civil society in these regions has evolved over the period covered by the evaluation (as summarised in ToR pp. 4-9 – see Annex 1). While the response has demonstrated an evolutionary pattern of development in which, increasingly, a flexible approach has been taken to adjusting to the needs of the individual regions and Enlargement candidates, potential candidates and partner countries, and their societies, the EU’s approach has also contained a constant set of emphases that are based in the understanding of the role of civil society, CSOs and citizens. This in turn reflects the ways in which civil society is involved in political, economic and social affairs in the European Union itself.

The challenge for EU engagement with civil society has been to find effective means of promoting the role ascribed to civil society in the normative stance of the EU – i.e. for it to be able to assume its place as a legitimate actor in the sphere of governance and societal development – notwithstanding the tensions that are present in the state-society relationship prevalent in many countries (and bearing in mind the fact that the principal relationship between the EU and its partners is achieved via partnerships at the level of central governments).

The principles for achieving this engagement were set out in the 2012 Commission Communication ‘The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with civil society in external relations,’ which form the basis of the EU’s support for civil society across three main areas of engagement: ‘(1) support to an enabling environment, (2) the protection of CSOs participation space and support to their engagement in policy dialogue (3) the development of capacities of CSOs’ (ToR p. 5).

Embedded alongside these tenets for engagement are the underlying working principles of the Rights-Based Approach deployed by the EU, with regard to application of rights, participation and access to the decision-making process, non-discrimination and equal access, accountability and access to the rule of law, transparency and access to information. These principles are reflected in the emphases on inclusivity, responding to the needs of vulnerable groups, minorities, Internally Displaced People, etc.

As the ToR summarise, the forms of engagement with civil society through **targeted support, mainstreaming of civil society, alongside political dialogue**, have been multi-faceted and have evolved in terms of design and scale over this period. These developments are summarised in the 2017 'Report on EU Engagement with Civil Society', and reflected in the 2017 'A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action' and the '2015-2019 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.' These documents lay out the vision of the EU's agenda for engaging with civil society and detail the ways in which the EU's perceptions of the roles of civil society and civil society organisations have developed over the period under evaluation.

The task of the current evaluation has been to assess the extent to which the needs of civil society have been effectively addressed through the actions undertaken by the EU. This assessment looks both at how the EU has responded to the developing situation and influenced it. The civil society landscape has been evolving substantially during this period, with regard to the range of civil society actors involved in the sphere, the nature of engagement of individual citizens with civil society initiatives (e.g. more ad hoc, issue-based grassroots activism has been on the rise alongside more traditional, organisation-based activities), the means used to engage with issues (e.g. through social media), and the location of engagement (including transnational activism via internet).

3.2. Reconstructed intervention logics

The reconstructed intervention logics (RILs) developed by the evaluation team were intended to serve as an analytical guide for the purpose of the evaluation.² By presenting the relationship between the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact in each sub-region over the period, the RIL provided a framework for the analysis, particularly in relation to the findings on effectiveness and impact of EU support.

This section, and the four sub-regional RILs presented in Annex 6 represent, in analytical terms, a set of 'constructs', with attendant limitations (e.g. with regard to the extent to which they can be used for verification purposes).

The task of conducting the initial reconstruction of the elements of the intervention logic required the ET to identify and consider key contextual issues relating to:

- **'drivers' of change** - key policy and contextual factors that have driven forward and underpinned the support and engagement;
- **'pathways' of change** - the means by which the EU has aimed to achieve results through its support to and engagement with civil society;
- **'enablers'** - factors/conditions that have been considered important or essential in order for EU initiatives relating to civil society to be effective;
- **'inhibitors'** - factors considered to be potential/actual obstacles;
- **'boundary partners'** - societal actors/groups/institutional partners identified as key partners/associates in pursuing the agendas laid out in the EU's strategy relating to civil society.

This process allowed the ET to conduct an initial identification of the range of issues relating to the evaluation of EU support to civil society in the regions they covered, which were then followed up in more detail in the next phases of the evaluation. These are included in more detail in Annex 6.

The following describes the elements of the results chain in the reconstructed ILs.

Level of the RIL	Description and relationship between the results
Inputs	Inputs of funds for actions supporting civil society as well as a number of non-spending policy engagement inputs and mainstreaming of civil society in other programming sectors. Financial inputs were delivered through a range of modalities: short-, medium- and long-term action grants, framework partnership agreements (FPAs), operating grants, direct grants to international organisations and CSOs and sector budget support.
Activities	Activities included capacity-building measures for CSOs at national and local level, and regional capacity-building activities; capacity-building for governments and civil service to cooperate more effectively with civil society, policy dialogue.

² As stated in the 'DG NEAR Guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation (July 2016)', p. 116, intervention logic reconstruction can be conducted by the EC prior to the evaluation to serve as a guide (in this case, it is developed under the guidance of the evaluation manager and the ISG).

Outputs	Activities produced a number of outputs, such as strengthened CSO capacity to engage in policy dialogue and advocacy, in CSO networks and in policy dialogue processes; better capacity of partner country governments and civil services to work with and for civil society; increased CSO knowledge of EU institutions and policies; enhanced links between CSOs from Enlargement candidates, potential candidates, neighbourhood partner countries and EU countries; support for CSO activities and civil society perspective considered in direct budget-funded activities (where applicable).
Outcomes	Outputs contributed to a number of outcomes, including civil society contributing to strengthening democracy and increased convergence of political views, a more conducive or enabling environment for civil society participation, and civil society contributing to gradual economic integration with EU market and inclusive economic growth and policy dialogue between different stakeholders.
Impact	Finally, outcomes were expected to translate to intermediate to long-term impacts, such as stronger civil society and stronger civil society contribution to the accession of the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates, an area of shared prosperity and good relations with the Neighbourhood countries, and a mutually beneficial relationship with Russia based on common values and international commitments. Another long-term impact was stronger civil society contribution to addressing root causes of political and social instability and cross-border threats in some regions covered by this evaluation.

The reconstructed intervention logics for each region were considered throughout the evaluation and provided a reference point from which hypotheses concerning the evaluation questions could be developed, tested and validated. In the following section, we present an overview of the inputs and spending activities in support of civil society, which provides key insights on the extent to which the first levels of the reconstructed intervention logic (inputs and activities) were realised.

4. Analysis of EU financial support to civil society

This section analyses the allocation of EU funds to targeted support and mainstreaming of civil society in the Enlargement candidates, potential candidates, and Neighbourhood countries as well as Russia. It is based on an analysis of all contracts for external action in the regions concerned by this evaluation, at both bilateral and regional levels.

The evaluation team constructed an inventory of all relevant civil society actions (i.e. targeted support and mainstreaming). The inventory includes financial support a) directly to CSOs, as main implementing partners; or support to other types of organisations (e.g. private contractors) who provide support to either improve the enabling environment for civil society or to build capacity within CSOs (e.g. network support actions, training, grant-making). Actions included in the inventory contribute directly to one or more of the three priorities of the COM (2012), i.e. enabling environment for civil society, support to CSO engagement in policy dialogue, and capacity development of CSOs.

As explained in Section 2.4, the quantitative analysis that has been conducted for this evaluation focuses on the period from 2013 to 2018, since this is the period for which complete data was available.

The evaluation team classified actions as either targeted or mainstreamed support based on the thematic focus of the action and/or the Financing Decision³. This approach was adopted because of the lack of a reliable classification of targeted and mainstreamed support in the EU's own data management systems.

An inventory of all actions classified as targeted or mainstreamed support to civil society is provided in Annex 4 of this report.

4.1. CSOs as key implementing partners of the EU

4.1.1. Support to civil society as a proportion of EU funds contracted in the NEAR countries

Support to civil society represented 7% of EU funds contracted for external action in the regions covered by this evaluation in the period 2013-2018. The relative importance of targeted and mainstreamed actions in the portfolio of EU-co-financed actions implemented by CSOs was similar in the Enlargement, Neighbourhood East and Neighbourhood South regions.

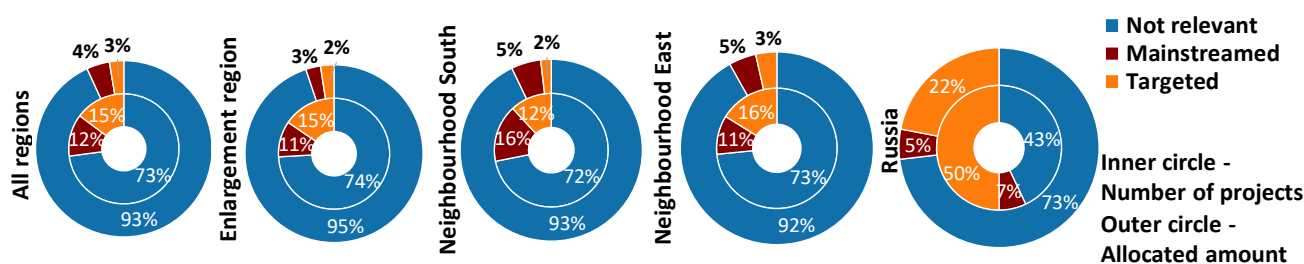
Overall, targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society represents 27% of the total number of contracts for operational support to the regions covered by this evaluation. This represents a significant commitment of EU staff time, particularly at EUD level. As we show later in this report, the significant number of actions implemented by CSOs enables the EU to address a wide range of niche issues, respond rapidly to emerging issues, and support a range of experimental and pilot initiatives.

In Russia, the EU does not have a significant bilateral development cooperation, and so the thematic programmes are relatively important in the overall EU cooperation portfolio. Targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society represented 27% of funds contracted for EU external action and 57% of the total number of contracts for external action signed by the EU.

The significance of civil society support within the overall EU portfolio in the regions covered by this evaluation is illustrated in the following charts.

³ For example, many EU staff classify actions implemented by CSOs under a DAC code related to civil society and governance, even if the action objective relates to a sector priority, and grant contracts with CSOs are only the selected implementation modality. The evaluation team resolved this challenge by classifying actions as targeted or mainstreamed, based on the thematic focus of the Financial Decision (FD) (where available) or the action title (in about 1,000 cases where the FD could not be identified). FDs and related actions with a main focus on strengthening civil society were classified as targeted. This includes all actions contracted via civil society support programmes. Other FD and actions, which had some other main focus, and where civil society was engaged as an implementing partner, on were classified as mainstreaming.

Figure 1 Civil society share of funds and % of actions contracted by the EU (all NEAR regions portfolio)



Source: Evaluation team analysis of CRIS data for all contracts for external actions contracted in the period 2013-2018.

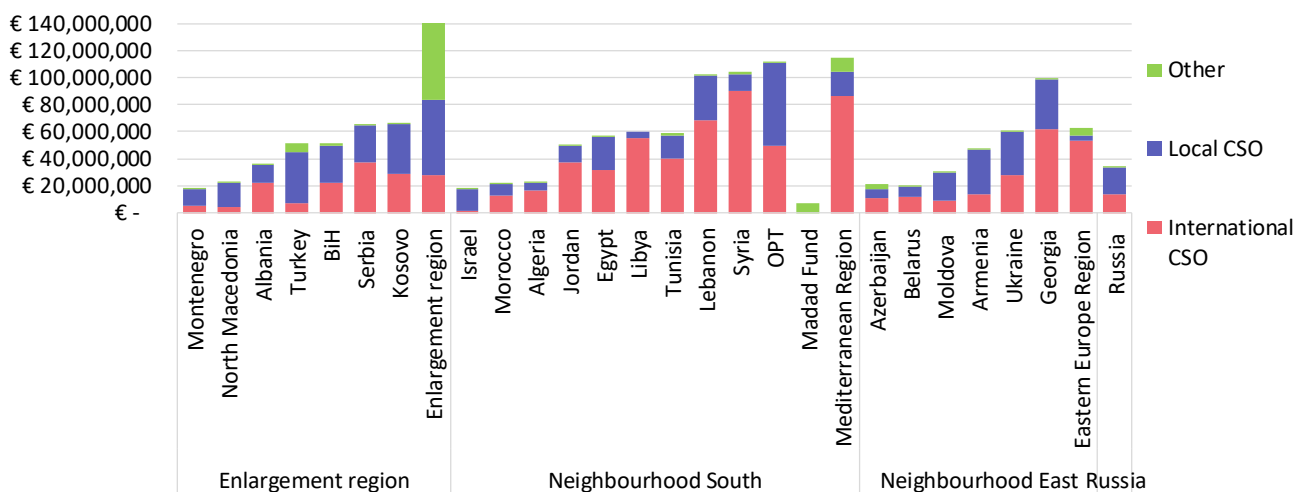
4.1.2. Implementation by local and international CSOs, and other organisations

In terms of volume of contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support in NEAR regions, the relative importance of local⁴ CSOs as implementing partners is greatest in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and in the Eastern neighbourhood; in all Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia, they are responsible for implementing a greater proportion of EU funds than international CSOs. In the Neighbourhood East, it is only in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Belarus that international CSOs manage a greater share of EU funds for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society than local CSOs.

In most Southern neighbourhood countries, however, international CSOs manage a greater share of EU targeted and mainstreamed support funds than local CSOs. The exceptions to this trend are Israel and Palestine where local civil society is well-established and benefits from a relatively more open environment, if compared to other countries of the region, notwithstanding the repression of Arab CSOs in Israel. International CSOs also manage a greater share of resources than local CSOs in regional and multi-country contracting.

The EU channels only a small proportion of project-based funding intended to support CSOs through international organisations or Member State (MS) agencies, partner country government agencies and private contractors ('other' in this chart). As the following chart shows, these implementing partners are mostly engaged for regional actions.

Figure 2 Implementing partners of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the NEAR regions



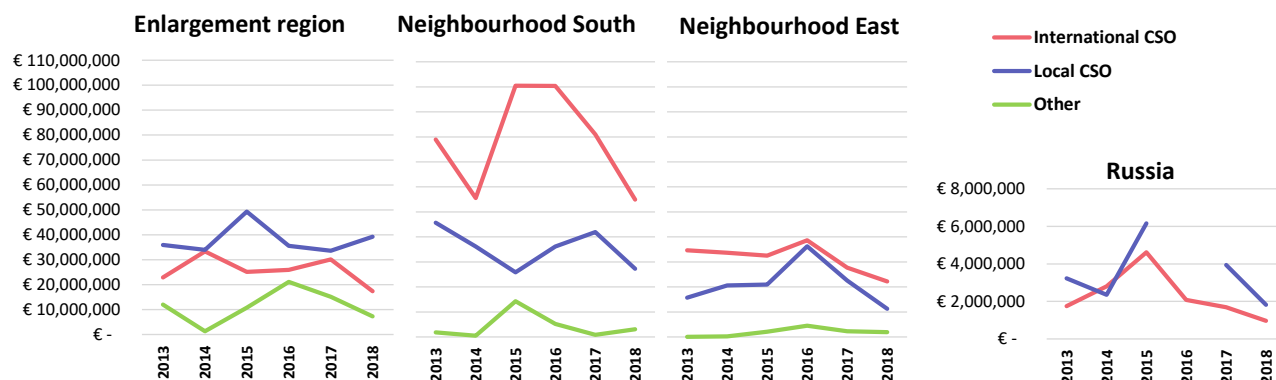
Source: Evaluation team analysis of CRIS data for all contracts for external actions contracted in the relevant period

The following chart illustrates the relative and absolute importance of each category of implementing organisation of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in each region, over time. For the Enlargement region, local CSOs consistently secured more EU funds than international CSOs. There is a slight upward trend in the absolute value of EU funds contracted to local CSOs alongside a gradual decline in EU funds contracted to international CSOs. In the Neighbourhood South, international CSOs consistently secure a

⁴ In this report, 'local' CSOs are those legally established in the NEAR country or countries being discussed. Other CSOs are referred to as 'international'.

significantly higher volume of EU funds than local CSOs, and there are no clear signs that this pattern is changing. In the Neighbourhood East, the advantage enjoyed by international CSOs has narrowed during the period covered by this evaluation. This mostly reflects an increase in the share of funds secured by local CSOs in Moldova and Ukraine. In Russia, the increasingly restrictive operating environment has particularly affected international CSOs, although funds contracted to local CSOs are also declining in recent years.

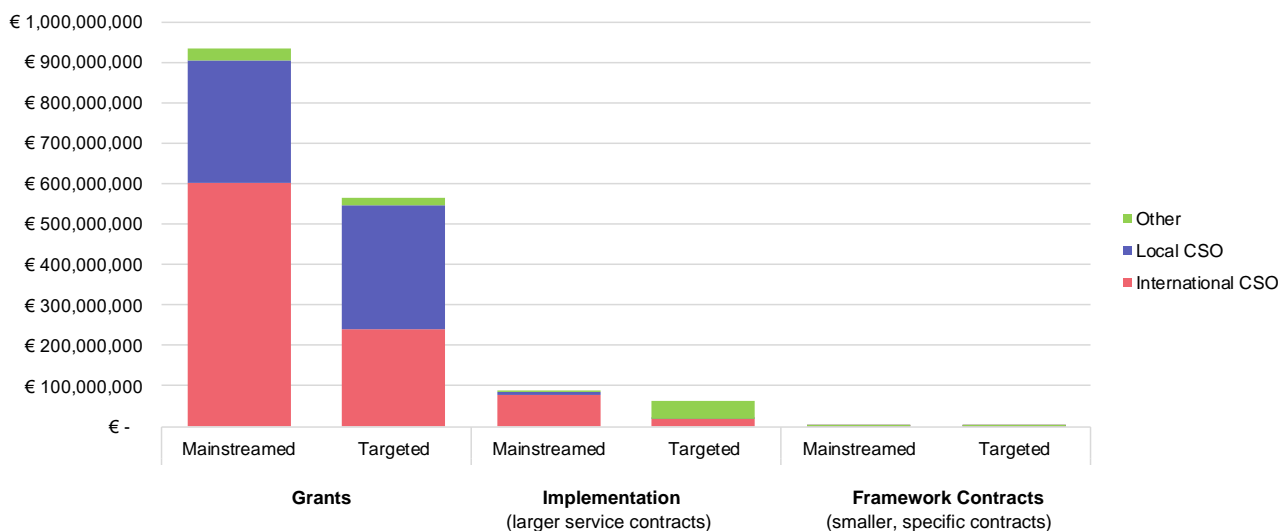
Figure 3 Implementing organisations of actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in each NEAR region, over time



Source: Evaluation team analysis of CRIS data for all contracts for external actions contracted in the relevant period

The EU also makes increasing use of modalities such as budget support and trust funds, in which CSOs do not play a significant role in management or implementation, directly or as sub-grantees.⁵ Grants represent a very high proportion of the EU funds implemented by CSOs, as shown in the first two columns of Figure 4. International CSOs deliver almost EUR 90m of larger service contracts across a range of sectors (as shown in the third column). This is considered as mainstreamed support. In contrast, CSOs play a minor role in the delivery of targeted technical assistance to support civil society. CSOs do not play a significant role in implementation of smaller service contracts to support civil society, via the framework contracts (FWC) mechanism. These modalities are mostly used to engage private contractors to provide services of one kind or another.

Figure 4 Implementing partners for selected modalities of support to civil society



Source: Evaluation team analysis of CRIS data for all contracts for external actions contracted in the relevant period

The following table shows the volume of EU funds contracted via the main implementation modalities. In proportional terms, there is little difference between mainstreamed and targeted support. There is a slightly higher use of non-grant modalities for targeted support (10.4%) compared to mainstreamed support (9.0%).

⁵ The implementing partners for grants from the Madad Fund and several other trust funds to which the EU contributes are analysed in the Update of the EU Child Rights Compendium (2017-2019) [ongoing – results to be published in mid-February 2020]

Table 2 Implementation modalities in all funds contracted for targeted and mainstreamed support (all NEAR countries 2013-18)

	Grant Contract	Implementation (service contract, delegation agreement)	Framework Contract	Total
Mainstreamed	€932,620,823	€86,668,113	€5,056,522	€1,024,345,458
Targeted	€566,816,077	€61,497,304	€4,330,370	€632,643,751
Grand Total	€1,499,436,900	€148,165,417	€9,386,892	€1,656,989,209

Source: Evaluation team analysis of CRIS data for all contracts for external actions contracted in the relevant period

4.2. Committed and contracted funds

In this section we compare the EU's funding commitments to support for civil society with the funds actually contracted, either as targeted and/or mainstreamed support to civil society.

There is no indicative commitment to civil society in the multiannual Country Strategy Papers for the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates. For the Neighbourhood countries, EU Single Support Frameworks (SSF) propose an indicative commitment to civil society from the **geographical programme**. This indicative commitment is not clearly defined or tracked, and EU staff interviewed for this study interpreted its scope and significance differently. It is typically expressed in the SSFs as a percentage of overall spending. The volume of funds to be committed is further adjusted at country-level and in regional Annual Action Programmes (AAP). The proportion of funds indicatively allocated to civil society support is not modified in any AAP consulted for this evaluation.

On the basis of the AAP, funds are committed in Financing Decisions (FDs). There is no obligation to fully commit the proportion of funds indicatively committed in the SSF. In practice, for the bilateral programme the volume of funds committed to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society is almost always lower than the indicative commitment declared in the SSF.

Funds are also indicatively committed to civil society through the AAPs of the **thematic programmes** and committed in FDs. For the EIDHR there is a country allocation for each country covered by this evaluation. The CSO-LA thematic programme does not apply to the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates but does contain a country allocation for each of the Neighbourhood countries covered by this evaluation. In addition, a few CSO-LA and EIDHR actions are allocated to lead applicants in the countries covered by this evaluation on the basis of global Calls for Proposals (not part of the NEAR Thematic Strategy).

Contracting of EU funds is rarely completed in the same calendar year as the financial commitment. The usual legal contracting deadline is N+1, i.e. at the end of the year following the commitment. Actual timing depends on a range of factors. There is no obligation on EU services to respect the SSF indicative commitment of funds for civil society in their contracting of funds to specific actions.

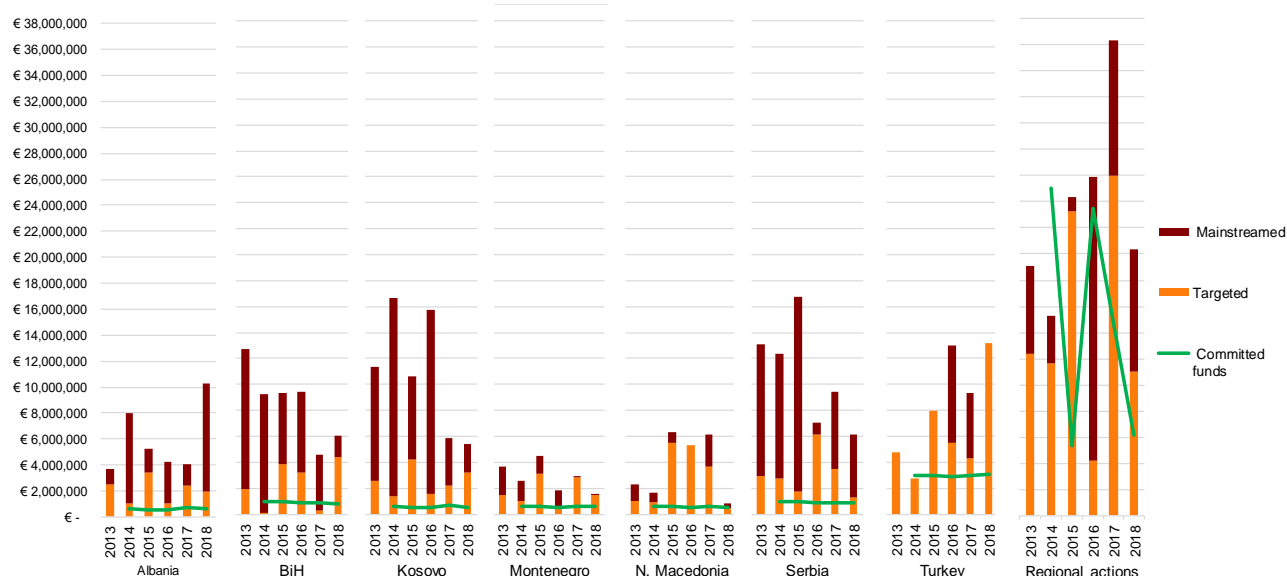
Funds contracted in a calendar year are based on FDs taken one or two years earlier. However, they also reflect EU staff awareness of more recent strategic orientations.

In general, the EU was more successful in reaching its SSF indicative funding commitment for civil society in those Neighbourhood countries where there was a specific commitment to civil society. In Neighbourhood countries where the funding commitment to civil society was part of a broader category including partner country institutions, the CSO element of the commitment was relatively neglected.

4.2.1. Committed and contracted funds – Enlargement region

In the Enlargement region, there is no specific commitment earmarked for civil society in the ISP. However, in interviews in EC headquarters (HQ) and in EU Delegations (EUDs), some EU staff consider 5% to be an informal target. Others suggest that support to civil society should remain constant. Funds are committed to civil society as country allocations under the EIDHR regional programme (in green in the following chart).

Figure 5 Committed and contracted funds by country (Enlargement candidates and potential candidates)



Source: Commitment calculated using country allocations declared in the AAPs for EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracted funds (relevant to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society) calculated based on evaluation team analysis of all actions contracted during the years indicated.

Overall, 5% of EU support contracted for Enlargement candidates and potential candidates consisted of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. There is a significant difference between the Western Balkans and Turkey. Almost 9% of EU support contracted for the Western Balkan countries consisted of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. In contrast, although EU support to Turkish civil society increased significantly in the period covered by this evaluation, only 1% of EU support contracted for Turkey consisted of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. This reflects the significant EU support to refugee programmes in Turkey, in which civil society is not a significant implementing partner in financial terms.

In Turkey, North Macedonia and Montenegro, support to civil society mostly took the form of targeted support. In others, particularly in Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainstreamed funds form the major part of EU support to civil society.

4.2.2. Committed and contracted funds – Neighbourhood East

In most Eastern Neighbourhood countries, an indicative 5% of funds from the geographic programme are committed to civil society. Belarus has a higher indicative commitment of 10%. There are also country-level commitments of funds under the EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracting of EU funds to targeted and mainstreamed support is higher than the indicative allocation to civil society in the SSF. The country-level commitment and contracted amounts are shown in the following table:

Table 3 Percentage commitments and contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society – Neighbourhood East

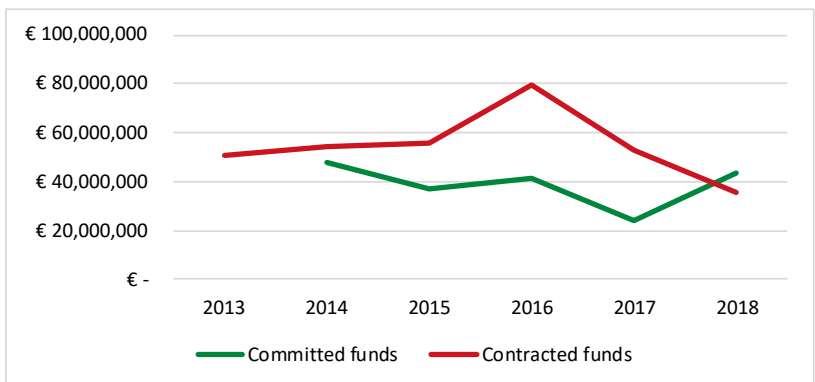
Country	SSF	Indicative target	Committed	Contracted 2013-18
Armenia	2017-2020	Complementary support for civil society development	5%	11%
	2014-2017	Complementary support for civil society development	<5%	
Azerbaijan	2014-2017	Complementary support for civil society	5%	17%
Belarus	2014-2017	Complementary support measures to civil society	10%	10%
Georgia	2014-2017	Support to Civil Society Organisations	5%	14%
Moldova	2014-2020	Civil society	<5%	5%
	2014-2017	Civil society	<5%	
Ukraine	2014-2017	Civil society		4%

Source: Targets and % committed funds from Single Support Frameworks; % of contracted funds based on evaluation team analysis of all actions contracted in the period 2013-2018 (geographic and thematic programming)

During the period covered by this evaluation, contracted funds were mostly higher than committed funds (more than twice as high in 2016 and 2017). There was a declining trend in commitments declared in AAP between 2014 and 2017, which was followed by a decline in contracting from 2016 to 2018.

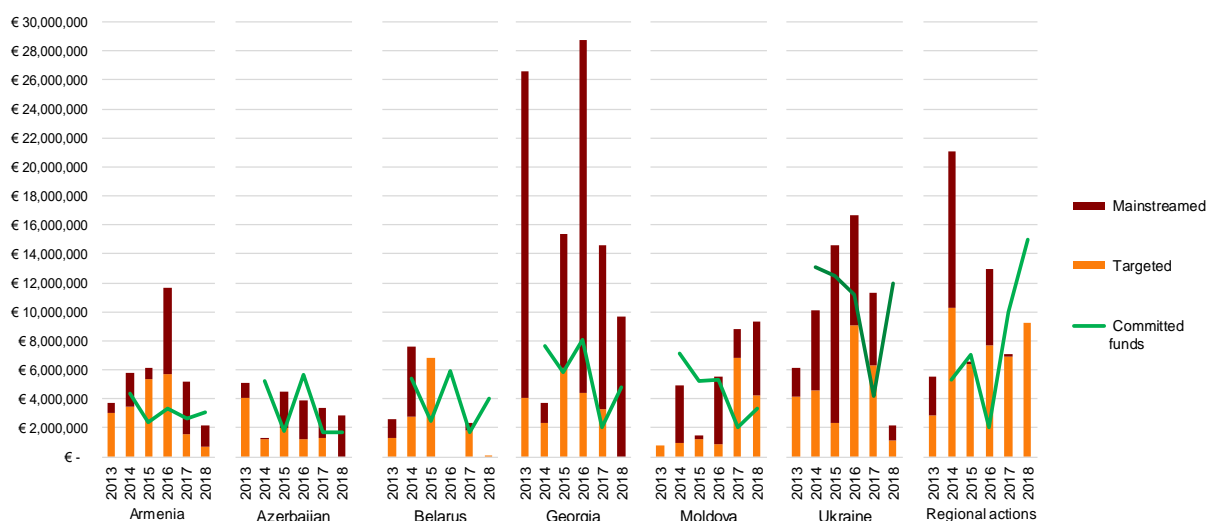
At the country level, there was significant annual fluctuation in the total volume of EU funds contracted for development cooperation. In most countries, the EU did not reach its earmarked level of support to CSOs from the geographical programme alone, but only when all targeted and mainstreamed actions are taken into account. The ability of CSOs to secure non-targeted EU funds is particularly significant in Georgia and Ukraine. In Belarus, the EU is increasingly unable to contract the funds it has earmarked for civil society; the downward trend in contracting in Azerbaijan may signal a future inability to contract the level of funds earmarked for civil society in the SSF. In Belarus, there is a significant decline in mainstreamed support to CSOs during the period covered by this evaluation; in all other countries mainstreaming increases.

Figure 6 Committed and contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society (Eastern Neighbourhood)



Source: Commitment calculated using the percentage indicative bilateral commitment declared in SSFs applied to the total annual commitment declared in AAPs, as well as the country allocations declared in the AAPs for EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracted funds (relevant to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society) calculated based on evaluation team analysis of all actions contracted during the years indicated.

Figure 7 Committed and contracted funds by country - Neighbourhood East



Source: Commitment calculated using the percentage indicative bilateral commitment declared in SSFs applied to the total annual commitment declared in AAPs, as well as the country allocations declared in the AAPs for EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracted funds (relevant to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society) calculated based on Landell Mills' analysis of all actions contracted during the years indicated.

4.2.3. Committed and contracted funds – Neighbourhood South

Most Southern Neighbourhood countries have a commitment of 5%, with the exceptions of Tunisia (2%) and Lebanon (10%). In Algeria and Egypt, countries with a restrictive environment for civil society, civil society is subsumed into larger, broader targets that include capacity development for partner country state institutions. The SSF for Morocco also subsumes civil society support into a very broad indicative commitment.

Table 4 Percentage commitments and contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society – Neighbourhood South

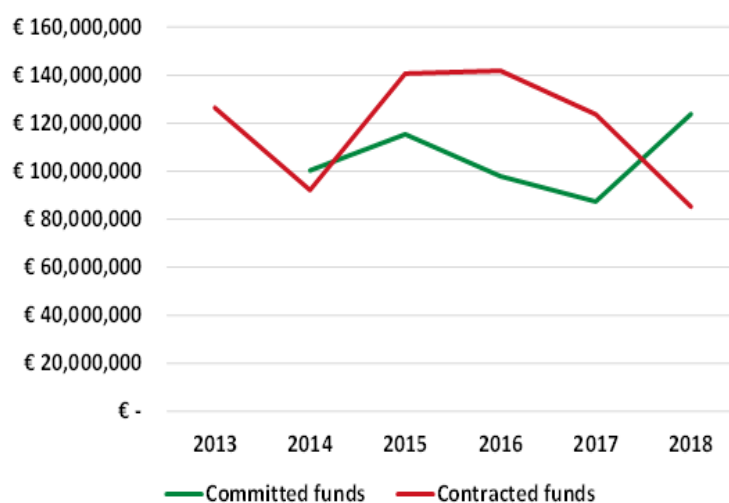
Country	SSF	Indicative target	Committed	Contracted 2013-18
Algeria	2014-2017	Appui complémentaire à la société civile et développement des capacités	15%	9% (civil society only)
Egypt	2014-2020	Complementary support for capacity development and civil society	10%	7% (civil society only)
Israel		There is no bilateral cooperation programme with Israel	--	36% (thematic programmes only)
Jordan	2014-2020	Support to Civil Society Organisations	5%	7%
Lebanon	2014-2020	Complementary support for civil society	5%	17%
	2017-2020	Complementary support in favour of civil society	10%	
Libya	2014-2020	Support to Civil Society Organisations	5%	44%
Morocco	2014-2020	Appui complémentaire au Plan d'action, à l'ALECA et à la société civile	20%	2% (civil society only)
oPt	2017-2020	Other sectors, East Jerusalem, civil society	7%	7%
Syria		There is no indicative allocation for civil society		28%
Tunisia	2014-2020	Mesures en faveur de la société civile	2%	5%

Source: Targets and % committed funds from Single Support Frameworks; % of contracted funds based on Landell Mills' analysis of all actions contracted in the period 2013-2018.

In the Southern Neighbourhood countries, contracted funds were generally higher than committed funds; in several years contracted funds were 20-30% higher than committed funds. A fall in commitments between 2015 and 2016 was followed by a fall in contracted funds from 2016-2018.

At the country level, contracting of targeted funds is insufficient to meet the EU's earmarked commitment of funds to support civil society.⁶ The volume of mainstreamed funds contracted to support civil society is significantly higher than the volume of targeted support contracted.

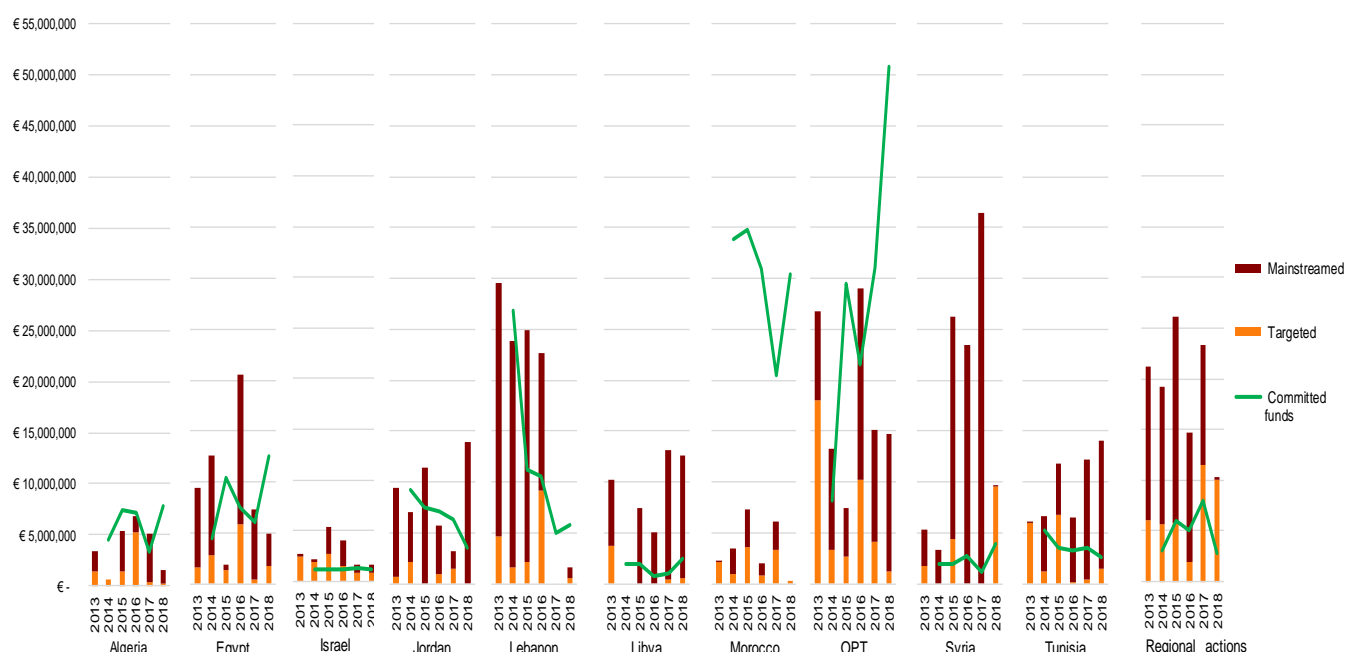
Figure 8 Committed and contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society (Southern Neighbourhood)



Source: Commitment calculated using the percentage indicative bilateral commitment declared in SSFs applied to the total annual commitment declared in AAPs, as well as the country allocations declared in the AAPs for EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracted funds (relevant to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society) calculated based on evaluation team analysis of all actions contracted during the years indicated.

⁶ In Egypt, Algeria and Morocco the indicative support to civil society is subsumed in a larger category of support. Israel receives no bilateral programme and therefore no indicative commitment from this to support civil society. The only indicative commitment to civil society is the country allocation under the EIDHR thematic programme.

Figure 9 Committed and contracted funds by country - Neighbourhood South



Source: Commitment calculated using the percentage indicative bilateral commitment declared in SSFs applied to the total annual commitment declared in AAPs, as well as the country allocations declared in the AAPs for EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. Contracted funds (relevant to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society) calculated based on Landell Mills' analysis of all actions contracted during the years indicated.

4.2.4. Committed and contracted funds – Russia

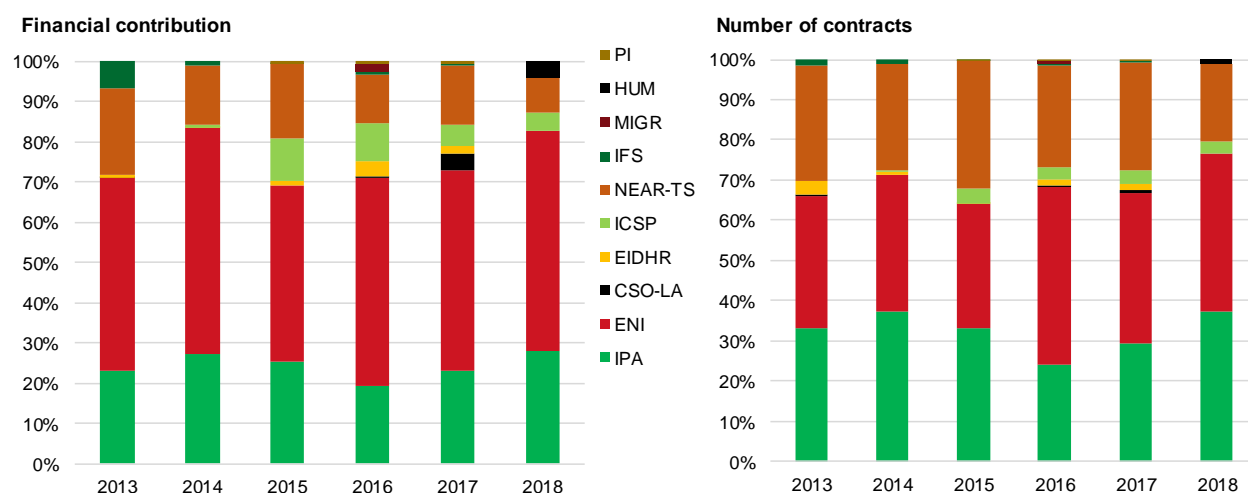
There is no explicit EU financial target for support to civil society in Russia. CSOs are engaged as implementing partners on actions in Russia financed under a modest bilateral programme under the Partnership Instrument (PI) as well as the thematic programmes. Contracting under the CSO-LA and EIDHR corresponds to the funds indicatively allocated to each country in the AAP for these thematic programmes.

4.3. Sources of funding of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society

There is complementarity in the application of EU instruments in support to civil society, as well as in the allocation of funds between instruments and support programmes (EIDHR, CSF, IPA, Cross Border Cooperation (CBC)). In relation to allocation of funds, there is evidence of an appropriate 'division of labour' between these instruments. Where EIDHR, for example, is investing more in its human rights, the Civil Society Facility (CSF) targets broader democracy development and CSO capacities including in relation to the EU integration agenda, as well as media, while CBC promotes initiatives of grassroots organisations, cooperation of government and civil society and social cohesion.

As the following charts show, the ENI and IPA are the source of more than 80% of EU funds contracted to actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. Most of the remaining funds are contracted through the part of the EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes that are managed through the NEAR Thematic Strategy (NEAR-TS in the charts). Other instruments, and actions financed from HQ under the EIDHR and CSO-LA, provide complementary funding. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Figure 10 Source of funding for contracted targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society (all countries covered by this evaluation)



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action co-financed by the EU in the period indicated, in the countries covered by this evaluation.

There is considerable variation in contract size between the regions and sources of EU funding. Contracts to support civil society in the Enlargement region were significantly smaller than in the Neighbourhood East and South regions; contracts for Russia were even smaller.

There were a few relatively large contracts, often relating to civil society support actions or for CSO engagement in humanitarian support, as well as a large number of relatively small contracts, for evaluations, studies and event organising. Most thematic programme support to CSOs was as grant contracts, but some CSOs also secured EU funding for delivery of capacity development services, studies and evaluations.

The average size of contracts for targeted and mainstreamed support varies significantly between regions. In the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates, the average IPA contract with local CSOs was for EUR 237,202, while the average contract with international CSOs was for EUR 870,221. In the Neighbourhood East, the average size of ENI contracts with local CSOs was EUR 560,616 while the average size of contracts with international CSOs was EUR 1,193,114. In the Neighbourhood South, the average ENI contract size was EUR 484,870 for local CSOs and EUR 1,222,539 for international CSOs. The average contract size for each source of funding and the main implementing partners is presented in the following figure.

Figure 11 Contract size and number of contracts by region and source of funding

Average contract size						# of contracts					
		Enlargement region	Neighbourhood South	Neighbourhood East	Russia			Enlargement region	Neighbourhood South	Neighbourhood East	Russia
IPA	International CSO	€870,221				IPA	International CSO	160			
	Local CSO	€273,202					Local CSO	671			
	Other	€1,675,922					Other	40			
ENI	International CSO		€1,222,539	€1,193,114	€272,598	ENI	International CSO		295	126	4
	Local CSO		€484,870	€560,616	€215,000		Local CSO		308	175	2
	Other		€466,157	€782,174	€89,200		Other		36	11	1
CSO-LA	International CSO	€6,000,000				CSO-LA	International CSO	1			
	Local CSO		€1,500				Local CSO		1		
	Other		€771,122				Other		2		
EIDHR	International CSO	€10,000	€903,764	€692,099		EIDHR	International CSO	1	5	2	
	Local CSO	€36,616			€1,000,000		Local CSO	11			1
	Other	€15,501					Other	11			
ICSP	International CSO	€899,999	€2,046,860	€2,005,433		ICSP	International CSO	1	31	6	
	Local CSO	€2,138,821	€1,094,430	€759,215			Local CSO	5	4	5	
	Other		€1,499,927				Other		1		
NEAR-TS	International CSO	€238,001	€585,297	€442,034	€501,685	NEAR-TS	International CSO	38	85	50	19
	Local CSO	€155,545	€379,888	€289,922	€415,366		Local CSO	202	158	131	34
	Other	€318,752	€1,425,284	€292,987			Other	1	4	9	
IFS	International CSO		€791,175	€162,345		IFS	International CSO		8	5	
	Local CSO	€1,702,447		€49,738			Local CSO	1		1	
	Other		€299,545				Other		1		
HUM	International CSO		€5,981,824	€1,401,181		HUM	International CSO		1	2	
	Local CSO						Local CSO				
PI	International CSO				€1,643,000	PI	International CSO				2
	Local CSO				€2,246,959		Local CSO				2

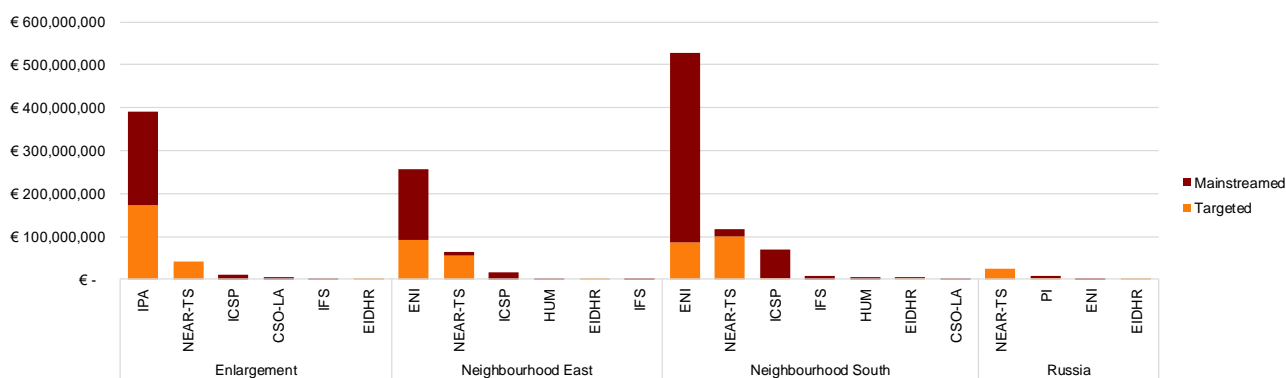
Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action co-financed by the EU in the period indicated, in the countries covered

In the Neighbourhood South countries, the ENI provides more than 85% of funds contracted to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society, through geographic allocations as well as via the part of EIDHR and CSO-LA allocated via the NEAR Thematic Strategy (NEAR-TS). Although the IcSP has provided a relatively constant proportion of financial support in recent years, this is allocated to a declining number of actions. This reflects an increase in the average size of IcSP actions as well as a decline in the average size of actions under other thematic programmes.

In the Neighbourhood East, the ENI provides only about 70% of funds contracted for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society, through geographic allocations as well as via the part of EIDHR and CSO-LA that is allocated through the NEAR Thematic Strategy (NEAR-TS). Other instruments provide 25% of contracted funds, to approximately 35% of relevant actions. This region shows the most significant diversification and specialisation of funding instruments, with a high level of complementarity. The allocations to the NEAR Thematic Strategy from the thematic instruments EIDHR and CSO-LA is particularly significant in this region, providing 20-40% of funding in each of the years examined. Almost all of this funding is considered targeted. A few actions are also financed from thematic programmes via global Calls for Proposals (managed from HQ outside the NEAR Thematic Strategy).

In Russia, the part of EIDHR and CSO-LA managed by NEAR (marked in these charts as NEAR-TS) has remained the most important source of funds for relevant actions, and the Partnership Instrument (PI) is increasingly important. Other ENI sources of funding and funds allocated from headquarters allocations under the thematic programmes EIDHR and CSO-LA (e.g., via global Calls for Proposals) play only a small role in EU support to civil society in Russia.

Figure 12 Contribution of EU funding sources by region and type of support to civil society

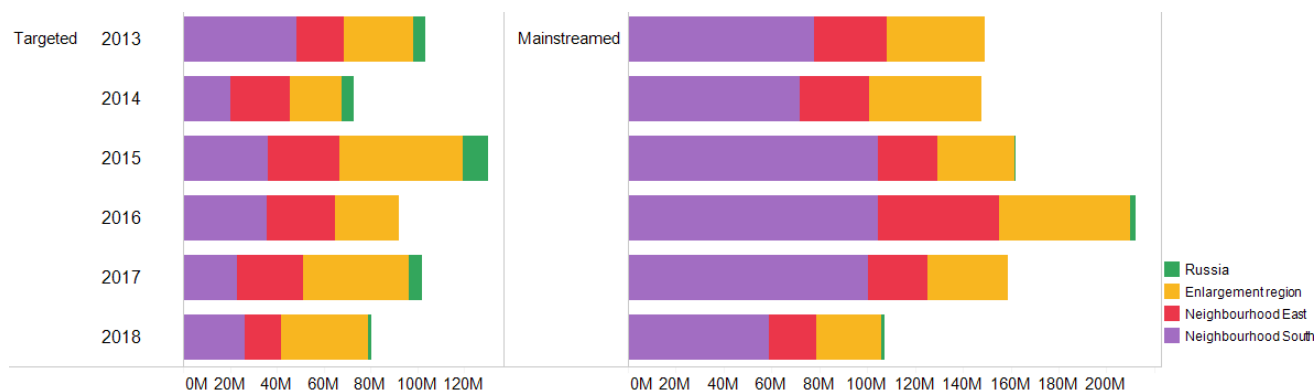


Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action co-financed by the EU in the period indicated, in the countries covered by this evaluation. NEAR-TS represents the NEAR-managed component of the EIDHR and CSO-LA thematic programmes. In this figure, EIDHR and CSO-LA refer to contracts awarded via calls managed outside NEAR/Delegations in the NEAR countries.

4.4. Absolute and relative importance of targeted and mainstreamed support within the EU cooperation portfolio

The absolute volume of EU funds contracted to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the period covered by this evaluation was relatively stable for each of the three sub-regions analysed in this evaluation. There were annual fluctuations of +/-15% in contracting. Since the average contract duration of targeted and mainstreamed support was close to 36 months, these fluctuations would not have a significant impact on the volume of funds consumed in any given year. The annual volume of contracted funds for targeted and mainstreamed support for the various sub-regions and for regional actions is presented in the following chart, which presents the trend in contracting of EU funds for targeted and mainstreamed support during the period covered by this evaluation.

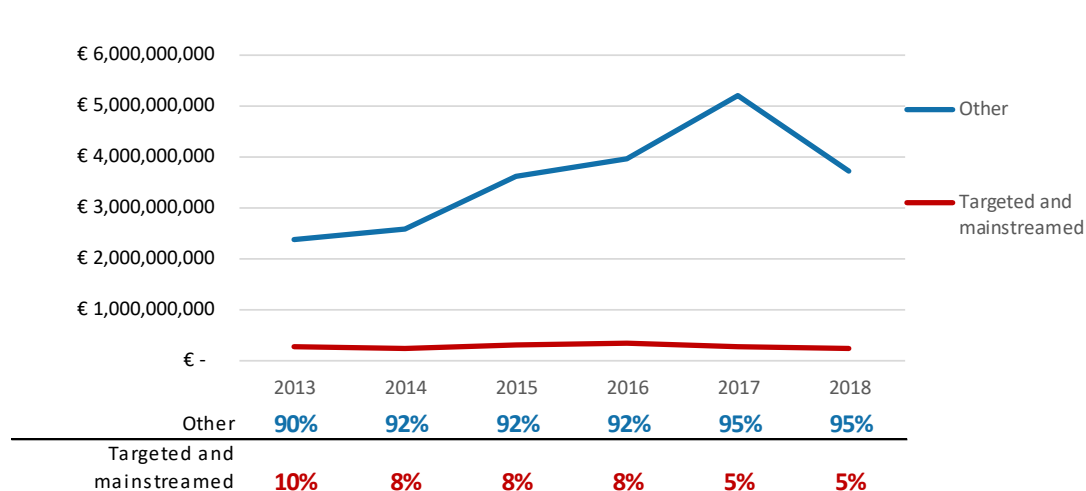
Figure 13 Regional share of targeted and mainstreamed support over time



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action signed during the years indicated. Classification of relevance carried out by the evaluation team.

The relatively stable volume of funds contracted as either targeted or mainstreamed support to civil society is in striking contrast to the significant increase in funds contracted for the rest of EU cooperation in the countries covered by this evaluation. Between 2013 and 2018, the volume of contracted targeted and mainstreamed support to CSOs dropped by 20%, while the contracted volume of other types of EU operational support increased by 57%. The contracting of funds by year is illustrated in the following chart.

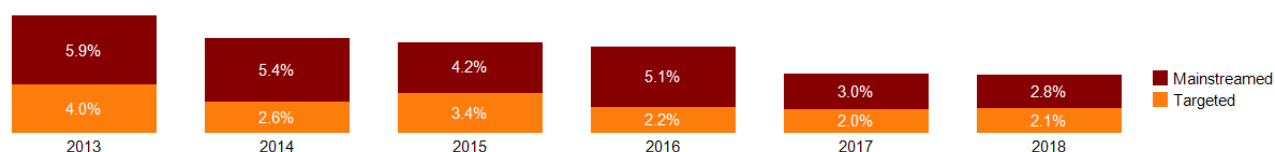
Figure 14 EU funds contracted for support to civil society (targeted and mainstreamed) compared to overall EU support (all NEAR countries) in EUR



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action in the countries concerned in the period concerned.

In proportional terms, targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society represented a declining share of total EU support during the period covered by this evaluation. Targeted and mainstreamed support constituted 9.9% of contracted funds in 2013, but only 4.9% of contracted funds in 2017 and 2018.

Figure 15 Proportion of all contracting that supports civil society - all NEAR countries

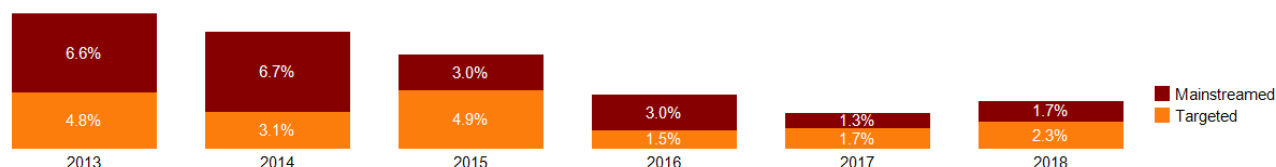


Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action in the countries concerned in the period concerned.

4.4.1. Regional trends in EU funds contracted to actions supporting civil society

In absolute terms, the **Enlargement region** has seen a relatively stable allocation of funds to actions supporting CSOs, with annual fluctuations of +/-10%. This should be analysed against the context of a very significant increase in non-CSO cooperation with the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates between 2013 and 2017 – with increases of 50-70% in several years. In proportional terms, therefore, targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society fell dramatically, from 11.4% of the EU portfolio in 2013 to 4.0% in 2018.

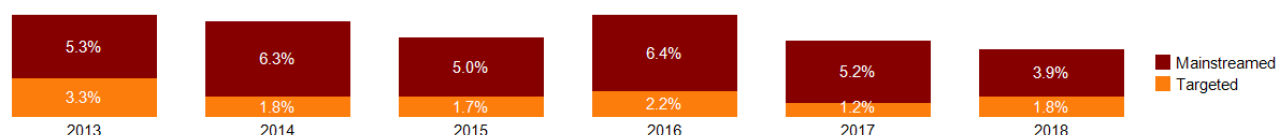
Figure 16 Targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society as a share of EU development cooperation (Enlargement region)



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action signed during the years indicated. Classification of relevance carried out by the evaluation team

In the **Neighbourhood South**, the EU contracted relatively stable absolute volumes of funds between 2013 and 2017, followed by an unusually low volume of contracting in 2018. In proportional terms, EU support to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society fluctuated between 6% and 9% of all contracted funds. This is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 17 Targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society as a share of EU development cooperation (Neighbourhood South)

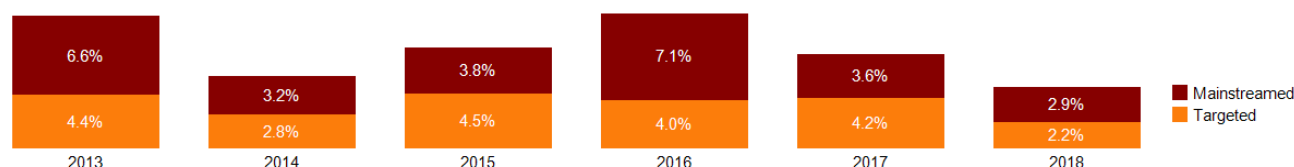


Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action signed during the years indicated. Classification of relevance carried out by the evaluation team

The proportion of EU funds that contribute to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society are highest in Israel (which, as a developed country, does not benefit from EU development cooperation) and in Syria and Libya – countries in a conflict/post-conflict situation. In this respect, it should be noted that, although CSOs implement a significant proportion of EU funds contracted to stand-alone actions for Syria, CSOs play only a marginal role in implementation of funds disbursed by the Madad Trust Fund, to which the EU makes significant contributions.

The absolute volume of EU support to actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the **Neighbourhood East** countries declined gradually between 2013 and 2017. In 2018 there was a sharp decline in EU funds allocated to actions supporting CSOs. In contrast, other forms of EU cooperation with these countries increased gradually throughout the period covered by this evaluation (with an unusually high contracting of funds in 2014, and a modest but relatively stable annual increase after that). In proportional terms, the share of EU support contracted to actions supporting civil society fluctuated between 5 and 11%. The proportion is higher in the South Caucasus, lower in Eastern Europe.

Figure 18 Targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society as a share of EU development cooperation (Neighbourhood East)



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action signed during the years indicated. Classification of relevance carried out by the evaluation team.

There was a dramatic restructuring of EU cooperation with **Russia** in the middle of the period covered by this evaluation. In the early years, overall support was low in absolute terms, with most funds contracted to actions associated with targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. The pattern changed in 2015-2016, with a

collapse in funds contracted to actions supporting CSOs alongside a significant increase in other forms of EU cooperation with Russia. The evaluators note that, within the thematic budget lines, a significant amount has been indicatively committed to Russia in 2018-20. This may re-establish civil society support as a significant proportion of EU cooperation with Russia. The evaluators note that, within the thematic budget lines, a significant amount has been indicatively committed to Russia in 2018-20. This may re-establish civil society support as a significant proportion of EU cooperation with Russia.

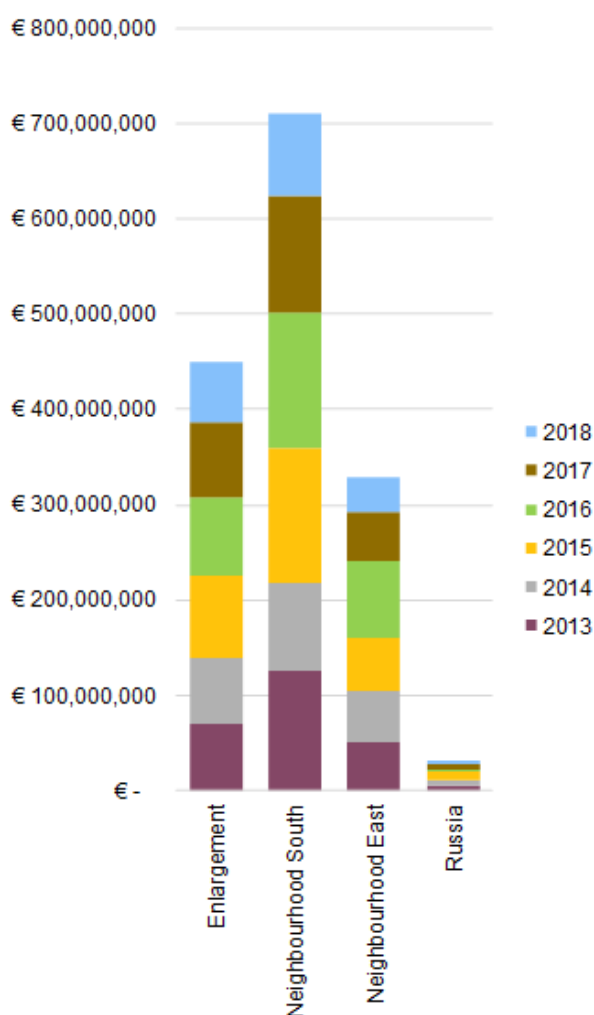
Support to civil society constituted more than 90% of EU funds contracted for cooperation with the Russian Federation in the years 2013 to 2015. Since then, support to civil society represents only a small share of total EU funds contracted for cooperation with the Russian Federation.

4.5. Contracting of funds by recipient country

The volume of EU funds contracted to actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the Enlargement candidate and potential candidate countries was relatively stable in recent years. In absolute terms, there was a modest declining trend in EU funds contracted everywhere in the Western Balkans, particularly in Serbia, and a rising trend in Turkey. EU support to CSOs in Turkey increased gradually in the period covered by this evaluation, despite a shrinking space for civil society engagement on many issues. To some extent, the expanding volume of CSO support reflects CSO engagement in supporting refugees from Syria, as well as the shift in EU strategy following the unsuccessful 2016 *coup d'état*.

EU support to civil society in the Neighbourhood South countries was stable overall, though with fluctuations in most countries. During the period covered in this analysis, support to Syria has steadily increased, while Lebanon has shown a downward trend after an earlier period of strengthened support to civil society.

Figure 19 Targeted and mainstreamed support by country and year – all NEAR countries



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action in the countries concerned

Most countries in the Neighbourhood East saw fluctuations in annual contracting of EU support to actions supporting civil society during the period covered by this evaluation. Only Moldova saw a gradual increase in EU support to civil society – everywhere else the trend was a gradual decline.

As already mentioned, EU support to civil society in Russia declined in the years covered by this evaluation.

4.6. Top recipient countries

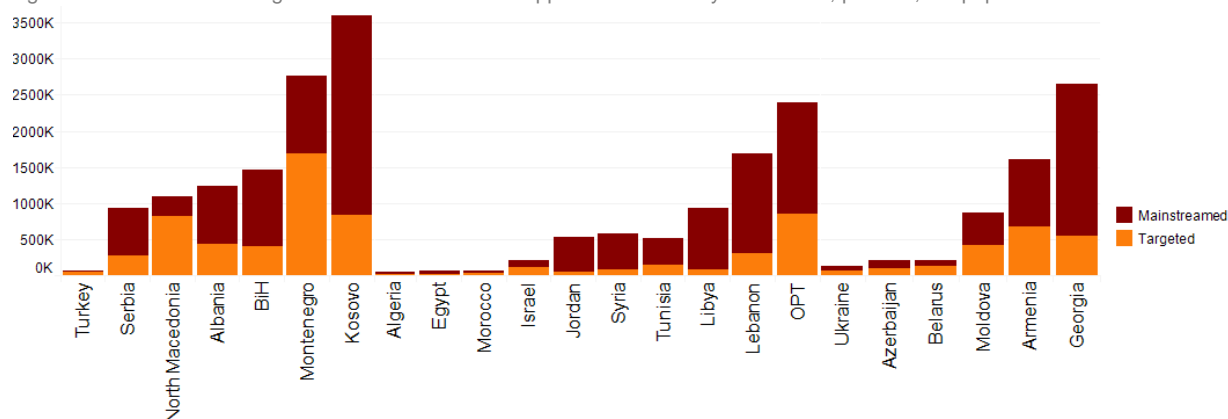
The highest contracting of funds to support civil society was in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Georgia, while the lowest contracting was in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro and Israel.

There is considerable variation in the *per capita* value of EU funds contracted to actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the countries covered by this evaluation. Countries with the highest *per capita* allocation in each region tend to have relatively smaller populations, as well as well-established and experienced civil society actors and a relatively favourable environment for CSO work.

The oPt and Georgia have the highest absolute and highest *per capita* contracting of EU funds for actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in their own regions. In contrast, Montenegro has the lowest absolute but highest *per capita* EU funds for actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the Enlargement region.

The following figure provides a *per capita* analysis of EU funds contracted to actions for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the countries covered by this evaluation.

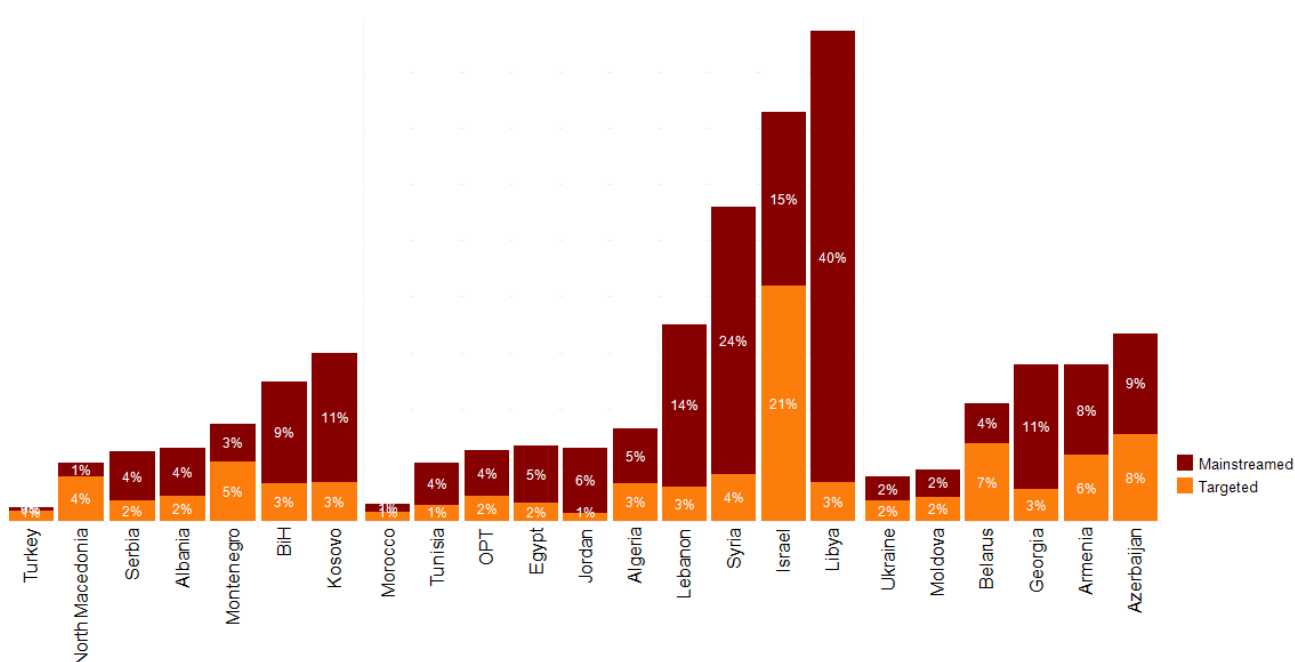
Figure 20 EU contracted targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society 2013-2018, per 100,000 population



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action in the countries concerned, signed during the years indicated

The following chart illustrates the proportion of targeted or mainstreamed support to civil society within EU development cooperation with each country. As the chart shows, countries where a relatively high proportion of EU cooperation supports civil society tend to be those where CSOs have secured mainstreamed support, rather than countries with particularly high levels of targeted support. Exceptions include Israel (which does not have a geographic programme) and Belarus and Azerbaijan (where the restrictive environment may make mainstreaming difficult).

Figure 21 Targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society as a proportion of EU development cooperation contracting (2013-2018)



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of all contracts for external action in the countries concerned, signed during the years indicated

This section has presented the main quantitative characteristics of the contracted EU targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in the countries covered by this evaluation in the period 2013-2018.

The following section provides a summary of qualitative and quantitative findings, structured around the standard OECD-DAC and EU evaluation criteria covering the whole period of the evaluation from 2007-2018.

5. Answers to the evaluation questions

This section summarises the key findings of each evaluation question, drawing examples from across the three main regions of the evaluation. It presents a summary answer to each evaluation question, based on the key judgement criteria and related findings under each EQ (provided in full in Annexes 2 and 3 of this report).

EQ1 (Relevance): *To what extent have the EU's objectives and approaches to its engagement (policy dialogue and financial support) with civil society properly addressed the variety of problems faced by / needs of Civil Society actors over the evaluation period?*

Summary: The operating environment for civil society varies from country to country, and yet there are distinct themes within the political contexts of the three main regions of this evaluation which have been the driving force for the EU's objectives in relation to its engagement with civil society. Where the environment for civil society has rapidly changed, the EU's approach has also been adjusted in response. Overall, the EU's approaches have sought to address the needs of civil society, particularly through consultation processes to inform design and implementation of targeted support and engagement in policy dialogue, and a range of modalities has also been used to deliver this support. Having this range of modalities at its disposal has allowed the EU to cater more appropriately to the diversity of the civil society sector, which ranges from small, grassroots NGOs to international organisations. In all regions, Financial Support to Third Parties (FTSP) is regarded as one of the most effective new ways of extending EU support to civil society. However, while there are strong examples of successful consultation, there is scope for the EU to improve its processes and mechanisms to ensure a wider and more meaningful engagement of civil society.

Finding 1.1 **The EU's objectives for its engagement with civil society have been largely driven by the political context, while also responding to the needs of civil society actors.**

In the Enlargement region, the accession process has been an important driver for the successful targeting of the EU's interventions towards strengthening civil society. EU assistance to civil society has been stable and continuous across the reference period of the evaluation, responding to needs to build a vibrant civil society able to provide strong input to policy making process across the countries. The EU's approach has evolved alongside political (and accession) priorities and processes, appropriately targeting the needs of civil society and the enabling environment for its development. Initially, EU support to the Enlargement region, while relevant and strong, was rather fragmented and divided into a number of interventions and lacked an overarching strategy for its assistance. To strengthen its response, the EU introduced the Civil Society Facility in 2009 and later the Guidelines for Civil Society in 2012 to reflect the increasingly integral role of an empowered civil society in advancing the EU accession process. In 2018, a new Communication was adopted, laying down priorities for cooperation with the Western Balkans, entitled the Strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'⁷. This strategy reiterated the importance of the enabling environment, the need for inclusive structured dialogue between civil society and governments on reform priorities, the empowerment of the civil society and the inclusion of citizens more broadly⁸.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU has responded to the challenges and needs faced by countries in democratic transition, in alignment with the EU democracy objectives set by the 2012 COM ('Roots for Democracy'). However, since 2012, change has been rapid, with internationalised civil wars in Syria and Libya and increased migratory flows to Europe, the election of Islamist governments in several countries, the authoritarian counter-revolution in Egypt and a general tendency to tighten civic spaces in most of the countries. The review of ENP policy in 2015, therefore, focused more on stability and security objectives, in many ways representing a return to the approach prevailing before the 'Arab Spring' revolutions.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood, 2008 was a landmark year, with the emergence of the Eastern Partnership Initiative which reinforced the EU's strategic engagement with the Neighbourhood East region, and resulted in

⁷ (2018); Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans; Strasbourg, 6.2.2018 COM(2018) 65 final; https://cdn4-eeas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/qBwfcORMS_MyivjhZSpABJwAP2LIW0eoVxqGZtf9_2k/mtime:1518429431/sites/eeas/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf accessed on 4 February 2019

⁸ COM(2018) 65 final. Communication from the Commission to the EU Parliament, the Council., the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans

stronger consultations with civil society actors and organisations in developing EU objectives, including through the creation of a dedicated regional civil society network, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

The EU's relations with Eastern Partnership countries differ greatly – with some countries expressing clear European integration aspirations and others without such aspirations and some pursuing closer integration with other international actors. This is reflected in the architecture of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), whereby the key goals of regional integration and closer co-operation with the EU remain primarily an EU aspiration. This translates into objectives for engagement with civil society, mainly driven by the EU's agenda and framed within larger political relations, and only then by local and bilateral considerations and needs of civil society.

Although the EaP has a regional character, the objectives for engagement with civil society in the East have gradually moved from a 'one size fits all' approach to the entire neighbourhood, towards a more country-specific model, also influencing how engagement with civil society is constructed and implemented. This mostly bilateral approach is further reinforced by the 2015 ENP Review, which promoted the principle of flexibility to support rapid adaptation of EU support to the sector in response to changing political circumstances and priorities.

The EU's approach is exemplified in Ukraine, where the last five years of the evaluation period saw a significant transformation of objectives in relation to civil society in response to the changing needs of both the government and civil society as well as the new geopolitical reality facing the country. The EU offered strategic assistance to the Ukrainian government in reforming its administration, economy and public policy, with significant civil society involvement as both stakeholder in consultation processes and beneficiary of assistance. On the other hand, the EU's engagement with civil society in Belarus and Azerbaijan remains limited by the political context of EU relations with those countries.

In Russia, the changing pattern of EU support to civil society has reflected the EU's relationship with Russia. The evolution in EU engagement with civil society as presented in the 2012 EC Communication 'The Roots of Democracy', aimed at strengthening the role of civil society actors and organisations to perform their role as development actors. However, this coincided with the tightening of restrictions placed on civil society through changes in legislation and the practices of state authorities in Russia since 2012, aimed at curtailing civil society's capacity to influence the policy sphere and the potential for civic participation. This trend was accompanied by the deterioration in relations between the EU and Russia since 2013. Nevertheless, the European Parliament in 2015 called on the European Commission to provide 'more ambitious financial assistance to Russian civil society from the existing external financial instruments'.⁹ In 2016, the EU adopted its five guiding principles in EU-Russia relations, including support to people-to-people contacts and civil society, underlying the fact the EU imposed sanctions on the Russian government, not the Russian people¹⁰. These guidelines, however, did not specify how to operationalise the EU support to civil society in Russia in a worsened political and legal climate. The volume of EU targeted and mainstreamed support to Russian civil society continued to fall, and this represents an increasingly marginal proportion of EU cooperation with Russia.

Finding 1.2 The EU's approaches have evolved over the period, adapting to the political context in order to better serve the needs of civil society

In the **Neighbourhood East**, the flexible approach of the EU, as illustrated in the case of Ukraine, can also be seen elsewhere in the region, and it helped to ensure that support matched emerging needs. For example, in Armenia, in 2018, the EU was able to react promptly to political changes offering support to election monitoring and watchdog NGOs.

The introduction of EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society in 2014 has also provided a more structured way of ensuring that the EU's approach is tailored to the specific context in each country by engaging with civil society actors in the process. During this evaluation, the value of Roadmaps was widely recognised by civil society interviewees and survey respondents, as well as EU staff. Document review for this evaluation shows that lessons learned were used to inform the selection of areas of support, along with thorough analysis of the national context. Roadmaps from all countries in the region show that CSOs are regularly consulted on matters of programming and implementation.

In the **Enlargement region**, as mentioned above, the EU approach evolved over the period of this evaluation. Support to civil society in the period 2007-2009 was implemented across many instruments (e.g. EIDHR, CBC, other IPA projects) and, since 2009, through the Civil Society Facility as a specific support programme under

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ The EU's Russia policy: Five guiding principles, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2016\)589857](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2016)589857)

IPA for civil society. This provided Technical Assistance (TA) to CSOs and also to government institutions dealing with civil society, for instance in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro). This Facility was complemented by EIDHR and EU IPA support within different components (e.g. Cross-Border Cooperation). A major milestone in the evolution of EU support to civil society was the adoption of the *Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in Enlargement candidates (2014-2020)*, which set the foundation of a more systematic response to civil society, while also promoting civil society as an actor in identification, planning of implementation and monitoring of IPA II support, receiving political and financial support.

IPA II brought further evolution of assistance through programming directly to civil society as a sector (e.g. in Turkey¹¹), or within sector programmes. The EU's support to civil society in Turkey¹² also evolved with the increasingly volatile political context in the country and shrinking space for civil society¹³, particularly following the attempted coup in 2016, when the State of Emergency was introduced and repeatedly extended, seriously affecting the respect of human rights and principles of rule of law. The EU response included an increase in funding for civil society, particularly under IPA II, which saw an almost doubling of the financial allocation in the period 2014-2017. During IPA I and, in the first period of IPA II, support to civil society was channeled via the Turkish Ministry of EU Affairs acting as the lead institution in this sub-sector, but the EU later changed the management mode for civil society development, with the majority of assistance being directly managed by the Commission *inter alia* via the Civil Society Facility.¹⁴ This communication reconfirmed the importance of civil society in the enlargement process in the Western Balkans.¹⁵

The shift to a **sector approach** in the last years of implementation of IPA I, whereby programming of assistance was done by sector, resulted in two important relevance effects: 1) diminishing fragmentation of assistance; and 2) a more systematic engagement with civil society through sector working groups.

In addition to ensuring a more systematic approach to programming, implementation and monitoring, the 2012 evaluation of civil society reported that there has been an evolution in terms of relevance of support and more strategic engagement with civil society¹⁶ as a result of the sector approach. However, the 2018 evaluation of the IPA Sector Approach¹⁷ has found that the quality of CSO participation has been poor (see Finding 3.6).

In the case of the **Neighbourhood South**, the EU's approach pre- and post-2011 has been adapted to the needs and the objectives of civil society, as determined by the political context in the region.

Prior to 2011, in the context of authoritarian regimes as a dominant model, the NSA-LA and EIDHR instruments were key to the EU's engagement with civil society and represented targeted support. These proved to be instrumental in supporting CSOs as they do not depend on bilateral relationships. For the actor-oriented NSA-LA instrument, the focus was on an inclusive development and consultation process between state and non-state actors at the local level whereas, for the more thematic-oriented EIDHR, the purpose was to promote and protect rights, and support human rights defenders.

Since 2011, and facing the turmoil of the Arab world, the EU has diversified and implemented a wide range of engagement and support channels, developing dedicated support to civil society through a more integrated approach. Democracy became a clear priority in the policy documents related to ENP, and was further reinforced

¹¹ Annual Action Programme for Civil Society in Turkey, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/3-ipa_2016_civil_society_ad_-_final_for_ipa_committee_clean.pdf

¹² Guiding documents for EU IPA for Turkey were the Council Regulation 1085/2006, adopted on 17 July 2006; the Framework Agreements signed between the Commission and the beneficiary country aiming at setting and agreeing the rules for co-operation concerning EC financial assistance to the beneficiary country and Financing Agreements signed between the Commission and the beneficiary country for each programme, they complete the technical, legal and administrative framework and include detailed and specific provisions for the management, monitoring, evaluation and control of each Operational Programme.

¹³ The process of EU-integration has suffered setbacks. At the moment of writing this report it is hard to forecast the future path of the EU-Turkey relationship, and such a situation obviously affects the cooperation with civil society in Turkey. During recent years, particularly following the coup in 2016, when the State of Emergency was introduced and repeatedly extended since then, the respect of human rights and principles of rule of law were seriously affected. Turkey derogated from its obligations foreseen by the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with an increasingly problematic context for civil society work. According to the figures presented in the Indicative Country Strategy Paper for Turkey, at the time of adoption of that document, there were closures of around 1500 CSOs as part of the government's post-coup measures and a more challenging legal environment characterised by more bureaucratic obstacles, in particular relating to their operation, their funding and, in some cases — such as for federations — their legal creation and core issues.

¹⁴ European Commission (2014 and revised in 2018); Revised Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2020); ADOPTED ON 10/08/2018

¹⁵ It underlines the importance of the enabling environment, the need for inclusive structured dialogue between civil society and governments on reform priorities, the empowerment of the civil society and the inclusion of citizens more broadly. COM(2018) 65 final. Communication from the Commission to the EU Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans

¹⁶ European Commission (2012); *Thematic Evaluation of EU's Support to Civil Society in the Western Balkans*

¹⁷ Evaluation of Sector Approach under IPA II, October 2018

through the incentive-based approach for partnership – ‘More for more’ – which rewards progress made by a Partner Country in the area of democratic reform with increased EU financial support.

The enhancement of civil society participation in policy dialogue, reforms and policy making processes received more emphasis after 2011, as confirmed by the increasing number of sectors in which civil society is intended to be involved (EU-Partner Countries’ Action Plans).

Since 2012, civil society support programmes have been a major innovation in the region, rolled out in five countries since 2012. They include a wide range of activities and services in support of capacity development to civil society, focussing on non-financial activities such as training, networking, and facilitation of consultation between CSOs and public authorities. Some programmes have also incorporated the sub-granting financial mechanism, and others have established local offices to decentralise their activities, and be closer to the interactions between civil society and the state.

In 2015, the ENP was revised and other key policy and strategy documents¹⁸ were produced in 2016. The report on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review, JOIN 2017 (18) indicates that ‘The Global Strategy will guide the EU’s external action in the years to come, and the reviewed ENP is an important instrument to attain its objectives, particularly answering the need to enhance the resilience of states and societies to the South of the EU.’

As shown in Section 4 of this report, in the period 2013-2018, a significant proportion of the overall EU support to countries that are considered to have restrictive environments for civil society consisted of civil society support (Algeria 9%, Egypt 7%, Azerbaijan 17%, Belarus 10%). Of these countries, only Egypt experienced a decline in the absolute volume of EU support to civil society during the period covered by this evaluation.

Finding 1.3 The EU has been successful in promoting a variety of implementation modalities, in response to the diversity of civil society, although procedures could be improved to increase their effectiveness

Across all the regions of this evaluation, the EU uses a variety of implementation modalities for **targeted support** to civil society. These include technical assistance service contracts, framework partnership agreements, operating grants, long and short-term single country and multi-beneficiary action grants (through Calls for Proposals), including those with sub-granting components, and also direct awards, which have been used in crisis contexts such as in Palestine. Other modalities include delegation agreements, such as those with United Nations agencies (UNICEF, UN Women Morocco, UN Habitat Zone C in Palestine) and also national institutions (Pro format in Morocco, + NHRIs).

Having this range of modalities at its disposal has allowed the EU to cater more appropriately to the diversity of the civil society sector, which ranges from small, grassroots NGOs to international organisations. For example, the Mid-term Evaluation of the CSF (2017) found that, since the introduction of the Civil Society Facility in the Enlargement region, more efforts have been invested in outreach to smaller grassroots CSOs through provision of financial (sub-grants) and non-financial (capacity-building) support to these organisations. This has been possible through grant contracts signed with larger CSOs that have the capacity and track record to manage such contracts. The modality used in such cases, formally known as Financial Support to Third Parties (FTSP), has been promoted by the Commission as a way of reaching newer and smaller players, extending support beyond those larger CSOs that have the financial capacity and resources to more successfully compete for EU grants. The evaluation found that FTSP has been successfully applied in the Neighbourhood South, particularly in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt, and to a lesser extent in Morocco and Algeria.

In the Eastern neighbourhood, the evaluation found flexibility in how the EU delivers support in response to the political context. For example, In Ukraine, during the political crisis of 2013-2014, ‘The EU has also been flexible and responsive to changing contexts and responded rapidly to the developments of 2013-2014 in Ukraine by allocating money to support the government alongside the earmarked and flexible support for civil society.’¹⁹ Sub-granting, indicated as a favoured form of support especially among smaller and grassroots organisations, has been increasingly embedded in programming documents and supported as a modality. The Action Fiche for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility 2017 notes that ‘With the increased outreach policy of the EU, more and more EU Delegations and regional projects implemented for and/or through CSOs have a Financial Support to Third Parties component (for example sub-granting). Sometimes ‘Financial Support to Third Parties’

¹⁸ The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (EEAS) in 2015, the Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy in 2016 (EEAS), and the COM 740 in 2016, ‘a new European Consensus on Development Our World, our Dignity, our Future’.

¹⁹ Evaluation of EU support for Civil Society in Ukraine 2007-2015 - unpublished

is the main purpose of the action. The experience so far has shown that Financial Support to Third Parties allows reaching out to CSOs that are not able to directly apply for EU grants.'

Stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation, however, reported ongoing challenges in deploying the Calls for Proposals modality. Delays that occur between the launch of CfPs and the time of implementation, can adversely affect the ability of CSOs to plan relevant activities. The FTSP modality also has limitations in the extent to which it allows final beneficiaries to participate in the project design, or to have their operational costs covered and it may also be seen to reduce the visibility of sub-granted activities for EUDs, although CSOs interviewed for this evaluation acknowledged the efforts of EU Focal Points to monitor and visit projects in the field.

The organisational/administrative constraints within DG NEAR and in EUDs were also noted as factors which limit the quantity and size of grants that can be awarded.

With regard to operating grants and framework agreements, the evaluation found a more limited use of these modalities. This was mainly due to the fact that they imply more of a political rather than a contractual relationship with the EU, and are aimed at building in-depth, cooperative partnerships with a single or a group of organisations (mainly coalitions/network/platforms). The strict financial regulations governing their use was also considered to be one of the limiting factors in use of these modalities.

While the EU has intended to mainstream civil society in the budget support modality, e.g. within IPA II budget support programmes, the evaluation found little evidence of this in practice. Interviewees noted that civil society is consulted in the programming of assistance, including for sector budget support (e.g. the consultation process for budget support to public administration reform (PAR) in Montenegro). However, civil society is yet to benefit from this type of support intervention.

Finding 1.4 The EU has become more systematic in the way that it consults with civil society in targeted support and policy dialogue – with mixed results depending on the political context

Consultation processes are a vital way of integrating civil society's needs and priorities into actions that are supported by the EU, for example in the design and implementation of specific interventions aimed at strengthening civil society (also referred to as targeted support) or consulting with civil society as part of multi-stakeholder dialogue.

i. Targeted support

Although in the **Enlargement region** the EU has been consulting with civil society throughout the reference period of the evaluation, as indicated in Finding 1.1, the IPA II Guidelines have strengthened the participation of civil society in programming. This evaluation has found that the EU's consultation approach has evolved within the reference period, moving from more erratic and ad-hoc consultations to very systematic processes, which include gathering inputs for EU Progress/Country reports and preparing Guidelines for Calls for Proposals under the Civil Society Facility (CSF). This also extends to cooperation between civil society and government or the private sector, and better dialogue between these partners is increasingly becoming a pre-requisite for EU support through action and other types of grants.

By investing significant efforts in ensuring consultations with civil society in programming of assistance in different sectors, particularly the sector budget support that is an increasingly important modality of support, the EU also seeks to consult civil society as a 'mainstreaming' measure. For this modality, it organises pre-consultations with civil society ahead of Special Group meetings (e.g. in Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo*, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia ahead PAR Special Groups).

Similarly, in the **Neighbourhood South**, the evaluation found that, since 2012, EUDs conduct systematic mapping of civil society at the beginning of their programming processes. The needs and priorities of civil society actors are always consulted on, as a mandatory measure, either before or during the drafting of key policy, programming or even technical documents, and in designing Calls for Proposals for civil society interventions.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, the evaluation also found that systematic consultation of civil society is widespread, occurring across the entire scope of the EU's programming, with interventions commonly based on, and including an element of dialogue with civil society. This also provides a good example of how mainstreaming guidance by the EU has been adopted in this region (see Finding 3.6), as confirmed by EUD staff in Georgia, where CSOs are actively engaged in programming.

ii. Policy dialogue

Efforts to engage civil society in policy dialogue have taken place over a long period in the Southern Neighbourhood, and even in countries with limited or controlled civic spaces. In particular, the EU's consultations with CSOs on human rights take place regularly, providing an important mechanism for key informants to raise EU awareness of the human rights situation in the country. Legitimacy of the consultation process is an important factor in strengthening the degree to which civil society's engagement is successful. For example, in Egypt and Jordan, policy dialogue is carried out through the various 'National', 'Supreme', 'Higher' Councils (e.g. National Council on Motherhood and Childhood in Egypt) which are non-governmental institutions that are controlled by the regime. These have provided an entry point through which the EU has a space for dialoguing with CSOs affiliated to or 'accepted' by the regime.

This can also be seen in the positive example of how EU support has used policy dialogue to engage civil society in a meaningful way to help improve the enabling environment in Jordan (see Box 1). Again, the legitimacy of the process was a key success factor, increasing ownership of the resulting position paper by the National Center for Human Rights in Jordan (NCHR). The process also allowed sufficient time (two days) for the dialogue sessions, and ensured that the CSOs were well prepared, having been trained to draft and submit a position paper.

Box 1: Success stories on civil society consultation in Jordan

As part of the EU Support to Civil Society in Jordan, a two-day policy dialogue and consultation session was held between civil society and the government of Jordan. The dialogue mainly covered two thematic priorities for promoting the engagement of civil society organisations; (a) the external legal environment for civil society and (b) the internal governance issues of CSOs. As part of this process, a core group of CSOs were trained to draft and submit a position paper explaining the key external and internal issues facing the enabling environment for the civil society in Jordan. The CSOs were, therefore, well prepared, and able to provide structured inputs in writing to this policy dialogue event. Key to this process was the legitimate expectation that the CSOs' analyses and recommendations would be discussed in order to positively impact on the political process and improve the legal environment for civil society to flourish.

The results of these policy dialogue sessions and the position paper were updated and submitted to the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) in Jordan, which now considers the position paper as being its own property. It will be used by NCHR to advocate for an enabling CSO internal and external environment.

Similar work continues in Jordan and the EUD conducts consultations with civil society and government representatives to advocate for promoting improvements to CSOs' enabling environment. The latest consultations with these parties were during the process of revising and updating the EU Roadmap for Engagement with the Civil Society in Jordan for the period 2018 – 2020.

A further way of improving the value of contributions is through sectoral networks or CSO-led coalitions, which were considered by EUDs in the Southern Neighbourhood to be a pre-requisite for effective policy dialogue between the EU and national authorities, as they provide a means by which higher quality contributions from civil society can be assembled and fed into EU strategy and dialogue with national authorities on budget support and reforms.

Despite the EU's efforts, however, there have been cases where the political environment and diplomatic relations between the EU have had a detrimental effect on the degree to which civil society can effectively engage in policy dialogue. For example, in Morocco, political dialogue was unilaterally broken by Morocco following the EU's decision not to integrate the regions of Western Sahara in the fishery and agriculture agreements between Morocco and the EU. And, in the Neighbourhood East (Azerbaijan and Belarus), civil society stakeholders consulted in this evaluation reported that consultations are weakened by governmental interference and/or control.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, consultations with civil society on policy dialogue are systematically conducted by EUDs. In Georgia, one EUD representative described civil society as 'partners in implementing policy reforms' acknowledging their critical role in awareness-raising, policy advocacy, lobbying, proposing legislative solutions and also conducting research and studies. Nevertheless, in some countries in the region, the issue of shrinking space severely limits the participation of civil society. In the words of one EEAS interviewee, the most critical challenge in Belarus consultations is 'the lack of participation of CS in the decision and policy-making process at national level' and, in Azerbaijan, CSOs commented that the presence of GONGOs forces them to 'censor' their participation during EU consultations.

In response to such restrictive environments, the evaluation found specific examples of how the EU seeks to adapt to government restrictions on civil society, by providing safe spaces for dialogue and engagement. For example, in Azerbaijan and Belarus, the EU enhanced its support through third parties such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), and organisations registered abroad, including in EU member states (e.g. in Lithuania and Poland). Due to the exceptional character of civil society and restricted space in Belarus, the EU invites civil society representatives (only from Belarus) to participate in regular meetings of HR Dialogue and EU Coordination Group in Brussels twice a year. This allows CS to come with their alternative proposals, in a dialogue facilitated by the EU.

Finding 1.5 Engagement of grassroots civil society in consultations can be limited by factors such as CSO capacity; and EU processes are not always able to assure outreach due to limited resources

In addition to the challenges associated with the political environment, the evaluation identified a number of limiting factors to the extent to which consultation processes can represent the needs and priorities of all of civil society, and particularly at the grassroots level. These range from budget limitations on the part of EUDs and CSOs themselves, to the processes themselves.

In the **Eastern Neighbourhood**, the scope of the EU's engagement and consultation with civil society has increased over the period of the evaluation, yet EU outreach still remains limited to larger and stronger networks, which are usually concentrated in capital cities and larger urban centres. This is partly a function of the structure of civil society in the Eastern Neighbourhood countries, where large groups of organisations cluster around donor presence and other resources, and to some degree also reflects the focus on large-scale, systemic change, which often warrants the involvement of large actors who are able to engage with other stakeholders on a strategic level. Other obstacles included the limited ability of CSOs to provide feedback during consultations due to language barriers or technical understanding of specific policies. The absence of wider grassroots contributions to EU consultations thus limits the mobilising potential of its engagement and outreach to communities and constituencies that civil society actors and organisations work with.

As indicated under Finding 1.4, measures are taken by the EU to combat civil society restrictions, such as through the EIDHR and the EED, which is more suitable for reaching out to certain smaller and grassroots CSOs, notably in media and human rights. However, this is not always pertinent to civil society in rural areas or in other sectors. According to the EUD in Belarus, efforts are made to extend outreach by organising events outside Minsk, but this is difficult due to severe restrictions on diplomatic missions' activities and on public events in the country. Even more severe restrictions are in place for CSOs and private entities engaging in any public or visibility activity. This was confirmed by one CSO interviewee in Belarus who reported that multimedia material produced with EU support was required to be de-branded, removing all acknowledgements of EU or donor support before it could be shared in schools in Belarus.

In the **Neighbourhood South**, the evaluation found criticism amongst some civil society respondents on the extent to which consultation processes are sufficiently participatory. Factors such as the lack of diversity amongst civil society actors, the formality of the meetings and the absence of follow-up after the consultations were considered to be limiting factors, and this was further confirmed by EUDs in the region who cited limited budgets as one of the key constraints to widening their consultations to organisations outside capital cities. As seen under Finding 1.2, processes are more successful when time and human resources are available to engage CSOs in a more meaningful way.

In the **Enlargement region**, consultations with civil society have evolved from rather scattered consultations on individual subjects to more structured consultations organised by sector, and on specific themes or sub-sectors within those. For instance, Serbian CSOs have been engaged in consultations on EU IPA priorities through the Sector Civil Society Organisations (SECO) mechanism²⁰ that engaged CSOs in sectoral groups. This mechanism was discontinued and, currently, Serbian CSOs provide their inputs through National Convent, which is an important partner of EU and of the Government in the EU accession process. The EU also invests significant financial and technical resources in the development of government consultation mechanisms, with varying success. For example, technical assistance was provided to support the NIPAC office in Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish an e-consultation mechanism for the programming of IPA assistance. However, document review and stakeholder interviews suggest that the main obstacle to effective consultations is not only the capacity, but also the enthusiasm of civil society to provide inputs to decision-making processes. In addition to discrepancies in capacity between CSOs in capital cities and in smaller communities, the evaluation also found that access to consultations is an issue, with most taking place in capitals with the participation of large organisations.

²⁰ The SECO mechanism was established by the European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in March 2011
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The EU has supported the strengthening of (sectoral) networks through a range of support measures, including TACSO, however quality and sustainability of networks still varies and depends on a number of factors including civil society sector expertise, strength of the network leadership, relations with government and EU counterparts and funding.

Finding 1.6 Engagement of civil society in policy dialogue has increased through more structured processes

In the **Southern Neighbourhood**, Civil Society forums have been an important approach to policy dialogue and they have evolved throughout the evaluation period, transitioning from the Euromed Civil Forum and CS Platform from 2007 to 2010 to a more instrument/policy-based approach to policy dialogue between 2011 and 2014. From 2014 to 2017, the EU resumed the South Regional Dialogue through the CS Forum South established by the Civil Society Facility Instrument under ENPI/ENI.

This EU-structured approach to dialogue has nevertheless been challenged by the CSOs involved, insofar as it is considered to respond more to the needs and the agenda of the EU rather than the needs of the CSOs. In addition, technical assistance mechanisms tend to mobilise CSOs as *beneficiaries* of EU funding and not as independent actors in development and governance, capable of engaging in critical dialogue with the EU regarding its policy in the region.

Since 2016, however, the global thematic civil society forums have attempted to integrate a regional dimension by establishing working groups by geographic areas including ENP South. The European networks of CSOs mitigate to some extent the 'silo' effect, by taking part in several thematic dialogues and by disseminating information to local CSOs in the region who also participate in the EU-Civil Society Forum dedicated to ENP South countries (CS Forum South, Majalat).

Since 2018, the Civil Society Forum South has had a more effective mechanism through which to engage with CSOs on policy dialogue at a regional level. The 'hub' and then 'Majalat' is led by a consortium of regional organisations and is regarded as an improvement to the former situation where representation was limited to mainly EU financial partners. However, while the mechanism has improved, some of the CSOs who had formerly participated in the Forum indicated that they were not convinced of the value of participating in it.

In the **Eastern Neighbourhood**, the National Platforms of the EaP Civil Society Forum were highlighted as the largest networks for EU-EaP country dialogue, alongside Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement/Association Agreement (CEPA/AA) bilateral platforms, but civil society stakeholders also recommended that they should be complemented by wider consultations with other networks, in order to promote a broader representation of interests.

Additionally, in countries with AA/CEPA bilateral agreements, namely Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia, the EU has promoted a range of structured dialogue platforms: EU civil society with EaP country civil society, EU-government-civil society and government-employers-employees (including trade unions).

In the **Enlargement region**, political dialogue and promotion of civil society role in policy processes, particularly within the scope of EU accession, has been an ongoing effort. The EU uses various modalities for such initiatives such as a) structured dialogue with civil society on issues relating to EU accession negotiations (e.g. chapters and/or supported sectors); b) opening the space for systematic inputs of CS into EU progress/country reports; c) dialogue with governments on issues relating to the enabling environment for civil society; d) supporting countrywide and regional networks; and e) contributing to other related EU, MS or regional initiatives (e.g. the Berlin process).

These modalities are generally appropriate and provide for effective support to civil society, as also emphasised by stakeholders interviewed within the scope of this evaluation. In particular, stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the evaluation undertook its field mission, highlighted the importance of this combination of support, which is seen as critical in ensuring that civil society is engaged in policy processes as a relevant actor.

EQ2 (Efficiency): To what extent has the scale of resources deployed been justified considering the changes/results produced? To what extent have efficiency gains, or losses, occurred?

Summary: The EU has contracted more resources than were indicatively committed for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society although funds for civil society declined as a proportion of overall EU support. While efficiency is reportedly an important consideration in how EUDs design support, and the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) modality is regarded as a highly cost-effective means through which to reach grassroots CSOs, decisions on choice of instruments and modalities are also governed by other factors such as thematic suitability and availability of financial mechanisms. While support delivered through grant programmes reduces costs at the EUD level, it may have the unintended consequence of deterring national or medium level CSOs from participation as implementers of civil society support due to the administrative and risk burden of EU contract management requirements. Cost-effectiveness of civil society mainstreaming shows promise in terms of widening and systematising support to civil society and is promoted by the EU. However, current EU systems are inadequate to measure its cost-effectiveness.

Finding 2.1 **The EU has contracted more resources than were indicatively committed for targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society. At the same time, in relative terms, civil society is increasingly marginal in EU cooperation with the NEAR countries.**

In the Neighbourhood countries, contracted targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society across was, in 2013-2017, significantly higher than the indicative allocation provided in the SSFs. There was no indicative allocation in the bilateral cooperation with the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates. However, because EU support rose in absolute terms, civil society attracted a falling proportion of EU funds in the Eastern Neighbourhood countries (see Figure 13) and Enlargement candidates and potential candidates (see Figure 11).

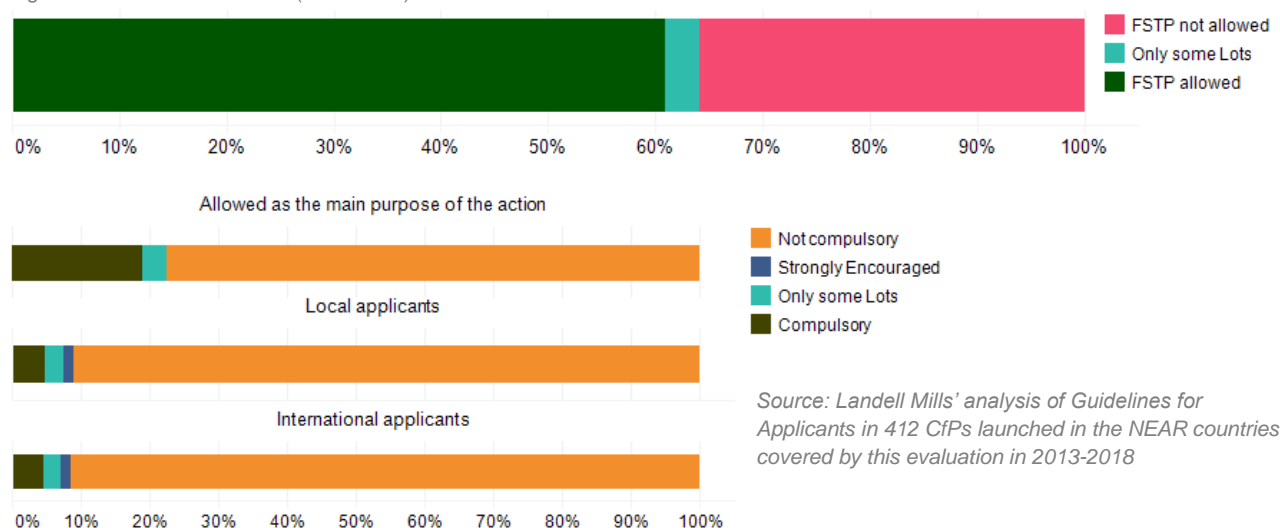
EU targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society represented 7% of EU development cooperation funds for the NEAR countries in the years 2013-2018. Because EU grant contracts are smaller than the average EU contract for external action, these funds represented 27% of EU contracts for external action in the NEAR countries. This represents a significant human resource commitment from the EU.

Section 4 of this report presents the evaluators' analysis of the financial support (targeted and mainstreamed) to civil society across all regions, highlighting the relationship between overall EU support and the proportion committed to, and contracted, in support of civil society.

Finding 2.2 **Financial Support to Third Parties is being increasingly applied, and is considered a cost-effective way of extending EU support to grassroots CSOs**

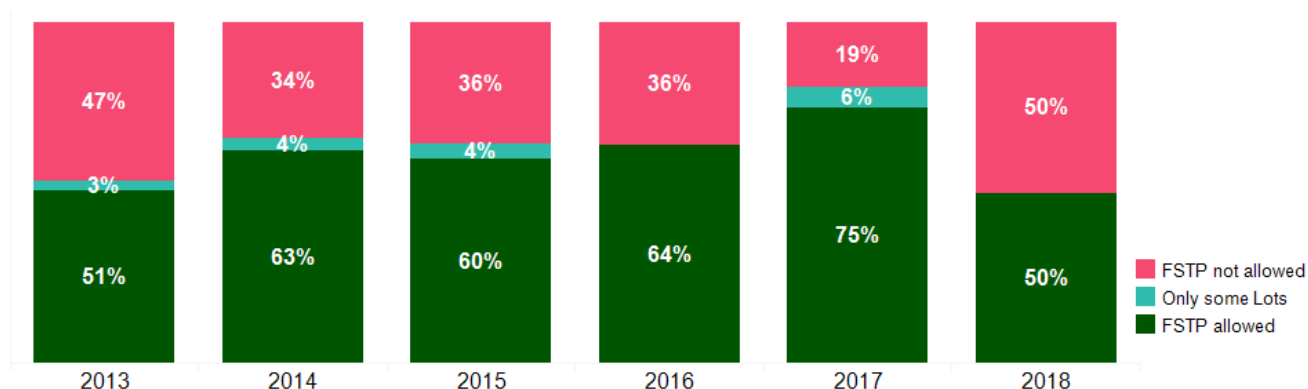
Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is common in Calls for Proposals (CfP) that are open to civil society actors. Of the 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation between 2013 and 2018, 64% permitted FSTP in some or all lots. FSTP was compulsory or strongly recommended in 9% of CfP where it was permitted, with no significant difference between international and national lead applicants. FSTP was allowed as the main purpose of the action in 21% of CfP where FSTP was permitted. These characteristics are illustrated in the following chart.

Figure 22 FSTP in NEAR CfP (2013-2018)



There was some annual fluctuation in the use of FSTP during the period covered by this evaluation, with an upward trend for the NEAR countries as a whole in 2013-2017, followed by an unusual year in 2018 which may not be statistically significant. At a more local level, use of FSTP was consistently high in the Neighbourhood East, rose gradually in the Neighbourhood South, and was consistently medium in the Enlargement region. The following chart shows the annual use of FSTP for NEAR countries as a whole.

Figure 23 Use of FSTP in CfP between 2013 and 2018, all NEAR countries



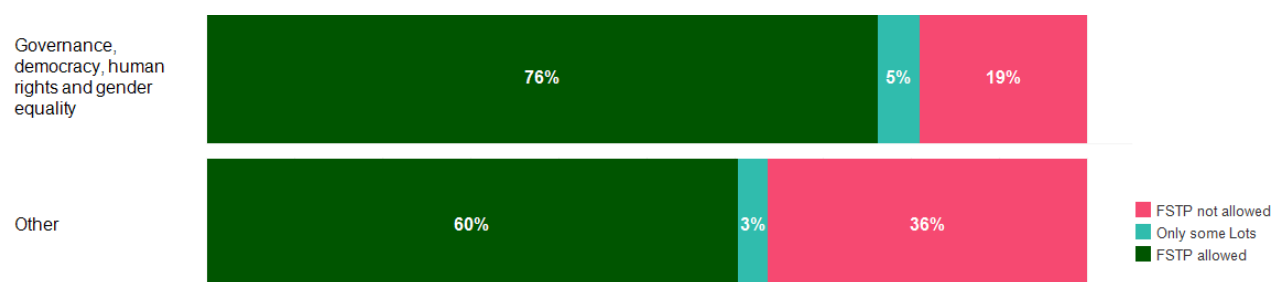
Source: Landell Mills' analysis of Guidelines for Applicants in 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation in 2013-2018

In the Neighbourhood South, FSTP was rapidly generalised between 2013 and 2018, being used in approximately 70% of CfP. It was compulsory in less than 10% of CfP where it was permitted, with no significant difference in treatment of international and local lead applicants. FSTP was allowed as the main purpose of the action in about 20% of CfP where FSTP was permitted. FSTP was used especially in countries where the capacity level of CS is high (Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Israel).

Country specific trends and examples of sub-granting are as follows:

- **Palestine** – high use of this modality reflects the level of capacity of civil society in this country in general and its ability to develop activities that engage both grassroots organisations and formal CSOs;
- **Morocco** – much lower use of FSTP due to the lack of interconnectedness between national and local levels of civil society, with the exception of a few long-standing CSOs who have local activities/offices, or built on a network, coalition or movement approach, bringing local and national level together;
- **Egypt** – used particularly in the SPRING programme, which foresaw a large sub-granting mechanism (70% of the grant), which has allowed for the building of advocacy, project design/management and networking capacities of hundreds of grassroots organisations in six of the most vulnerable governorates in Egypt;
- **Algeria** - the Michwar Project, and then Joussour - a programme developed by AFD according to a territorial and multi-stakeholder approach - have helped to increase the access of local CSOs and grassroots organisation to EU grants.

Figure 24 Use of FSTP in CfP between 2013 and 2018, Neighbourhood South

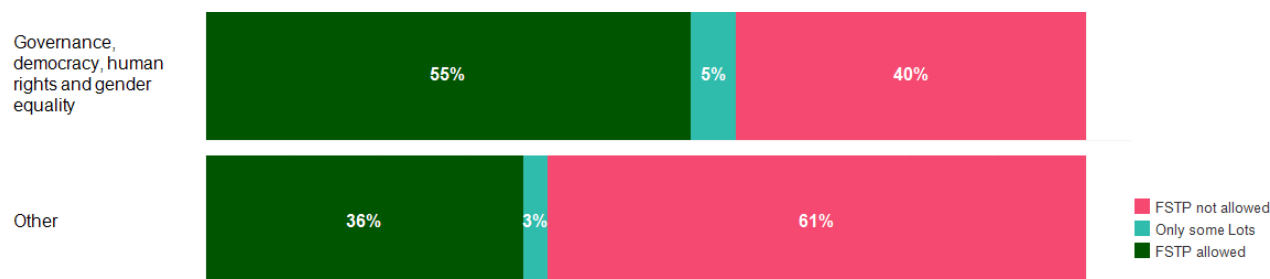


Source: Landell Mills' analysis of Guidelines for Applicants in 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation in 2013-2018

In the **Enlargement region**, sub-granting schemes have started to become a more common way of supporting civil society interventions. The increase in use is linked to the establishment of the CSF and IPA. Nevertheless, FSTP is used in only about half of the EU's CfP in these countries. It is compulsory for international and national lead applicants in about 7% of CfP where FSTP is permitted, and allowed as the main purpose of the action in approximately 20% of CfP where FSTP is permitted.

EU staff and CSOs interviewed for this evaluation consider FSTP to be an effective tool to ensure outreach and capacity building of grassroots and small CSOs. Review of other instruments for support to civil society such as EIDHR and IPA CBC as well as the review of sampled projects indicate a good level of outreach to grassroots.

Figure 25 Use of FSTP in CfP between 2013 and 2018, Enlargement region



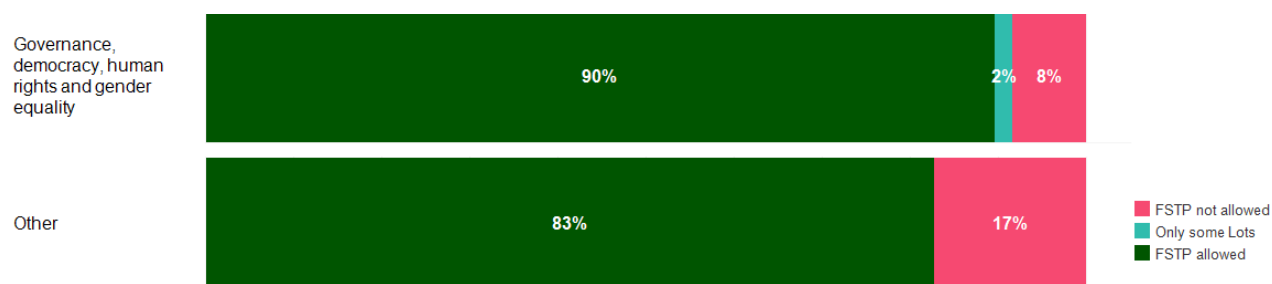
Source: Landell Mills' analysis of Guidelines for Applicants in 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation in 2013-2018

In the **Neighbourhood East**, feedback from civil society during the evaluation regarding the use of FSTP is overwhelmingly positive. This modality was used in the majority of CfP throughout the period covered by this evaluation.

- **Azerbaijan** – rather than FTSP, it is the EIDHR that has allowed for more flexibility in support to CSOs compared to other instruments, as well as funding via the EED which has also led to better outreach to grassroots, although, as survey respondents noted, access to funding under EIDHR calls has now been curtailed.
- **Armenia** – as a country with 4000 CSOs at the time of the evaluation (2018-19), three CSO capacity-building projects were in operation with a significant sub-granting component. One such intervention, the STRONG Civil Society Organisations for Stronger Armenia project, worked with 301 CSOs, most of them outside Yerevan and, within just one work package, has effectively reached nearly 10% of the country's CSOs.
- **Georgia** - CSO and donor interviewees stated that EU funding procedures often exclude very small, grassroots level NGOs, and that most EU support goes to Tbilisi-based organisations (EaP CSF 2018 Annual Assembly Tbilisi). According to a country evaluation from 2014, a ratio of national CSOs to grassroots ones in Georgia stands at about three to one, but the evaluation notes that the situation has been getting better and that 'it would be incorrect to say that EU funding has gone only to the elite few'. EUD staff report that 430 CSOs and small business entities have benefited from FSTP sub-grants in recent years. Previous evaluations note that grassroots are one of several groups excluded from a number of funding instruments together with others such as 'faith-based organisations, diaspora organisations, the media, and private sector organisations'²¹
- **Moldova** – the Moldova Civil Society Fiche (2018) stated that 'small organisations cannot access direct funding because of low management capacities'. The local EUD in Chisinau actively addressed the problem by launching a call for CSO sub-granting report in 2017. The EaP CSF Scoping Report for Moldova also notes that 'the introduction of fewer, larger grants with the obligation to re-grant 70% of the awarded total is expected to facilitate access to EU resources by smaller and regional CSOs'.
- **Ukraine** – Civic Synergy is an example of a large-scale intervention with a sub-granting component, it is implemented via the local Open Society Foundation office (International Renaissance Foundation).

²¹ Evaluation of EU Co-operation with Georgia 2007-2013, May 2015).

Figure 26 Use of FSTP in CfP between 2013 and 2018, Neighbourhood East



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of Guidelines for Applicants in 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation in 2013-2018

Across all regions, many CSO interviewees expressed concern that the financial, administrative and technical burden of managing FSTP is likely to discourage smaller and local CSOs from applying, while the largest local CSOs and international CSOs are more likely to be able to implement an action using this modality. If true, this would be an unintended negative consequence of FSTP, reducing the EU's direct engagement with local CSOs as lead applicants in exchange for a greater indirect engagement with local CSOs as FSTP beneficiaries. Middle size, local CSOs may also face particularly challenging conditions: too small to win EU grants, and too large to be able to operate sustainably on FSTP arrangements.

The EU has not yet established an adequate data management system that could support monitoring of FSTP. Specifically, there is no possibility in CRIS to record that an action includes FSTP, the identity of sub-grantees, the purpose of sub-granting and the amounts sub-granted. There is still a shortage of sectoral, country or regional studies that provide significant findings about use of and results of FSTP.

Finding 2.3 EUDs consider cost-efficiency in how to support civil society through different instruments and modalities alongside other factors

In the **Enlargement region**, The EU has continually improved the extent to which its resources are deployed in a more cost-efficient manner, and particularly since the advent of the separate facility, CSF, which provides support in a more transparent and coherent manner in comparison to pre-CSF IPA assistance which was less coordinated. Specific examples of how the EU considers cost-efficiency in its use of modalities have included the organising of more tasks under one Terms of Reference (and contract), which helps to concentrate more services and action grants with fewer contracts and larger funds. This is considered to be an important cost-efficiency gain for EUDs, for whom the management of a larger number of contracts had previously been a challenge.

The evaluation team explored issues of cost-efficiency related to increased use of the FSTP modality. Most EU staff interviewed for this evaluation consider FSTP as a more cost-effective management of grant support. The most common argument provided is that grant contracts with CSOs are, on average, smaller than service contracts for TA, leading to high EU management costs. The EU management costs relating to grants incorporating FSTP are significantly lower than the management costs of separate grant agreements, or service contracts for ad hoc grant-making structures managed by TA.

The EU has described FSTP as a particularly efficient way 'to reach out to more beneficiary organisations and to those which do not have the capacity to apply for regular Calls for Proposals (including small and grass-roots organisations)'²² As mentioned earlier, FSTP is included in almost 90% of CfP in the Eastern Neighbourhood, almost 70% of CfP in the Southern Neighbourhood, and about half of CfP in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates. The cost-efficiency benefit is therefore different in each region.

Although EUDs in the **Neighbourhood South** consider FSTP to be a cost-efficient aid modality for reaching smaller CSOs, in this evaluation they also indicated that, ultimately, choices related to the use of different instruments depend more on the relevance of the instruments (specific nature, and availability of funds) in responding to the needs of the intervention, rather than cost-efficiency. While cost-efficiency is taken into account at all stages of programming and through the quality review process, it does not dominate the decision-making process. Other cost-efficiency measures employed in the region include combining CfP proposals under the EIDHR and CSO-LA into one call; and using the two-year planning process. Resorting to indirect management, delegation agreements, contract services and, to a lesser extent, technical assistance, in order to increase allocated budgets and delegate management tasks to third parties is another trend observed to

²² Supporting Civil Society – How to Reach Further and Deeper with the Right Mix of Funding Modalities, DG NEAR, Evaluation of the EU's engagement with Civil Society in the enlargement, neighbourhood regions and Russia over the period 2007-2018 Final Report – March 2020

improve cost-efficiency and is particularly the case in Morocco. Here, the Focal Points in the delegations, with the support of the members of the CoTE, were able to experiment with different approaches in the region by asking about the best use or the best mix of grant, technical assistance and direct agreement/contract service.

Finding 2.4 Management of EU grant contracts generates an unwelcome administrative burden for CSOs

The evaluation found several efficiency challenges for grant beneficiaries in managing EU grant contracts (FTSP).

- Strict EU financial reporting requirements require grant beneficiaries to invest in accounting and financial management systems that would not be required to the same extent if they worked only with other donors. This constitutes a significant transaction cost for CSOs that work with the EU.
- CSOs and some EU staff commented that many CSOs implementing EU grant contracts find it difficult to manage cashflow relating to the 20% cost retention practised by the EU. This cashflow challenge is particularly felt between the end of activities and arrival of the final payment. A number of CSOs take bridging loans to cover this cashflow problem, incurring costs which cannot be charged to the action. This problem disproportionately concerns local CSOs, as these have, on average, lower financial reserves than international CSOs that implement grant contracts with the EU.
- Many CSOs, particularly in the Neighbourhood South, told the evaluators that they invest in external consultancy services to prepare EU grant applications. This cost, which can be considerable for a local CSO, cannot be charged to the action.

While the above procedures doubtless create efficiency gains for the EU, they would seem to be to a greater or lesser extent offset by the increased administrative costs for the CSO implementing partners.

Finding 2.5 While there are good examples of monitoring cost-effectiveness in targeted support, this is not yet systematic

In the **Enlargement region**, information on how implementing organisations have integrated M&E into their projects was very limited, and almost all projects reviewed based their monitoring on developing Annual Workplans as the main monitoring instrument to support them in preparing interim and final reports. Nevertheless, there were some exceptions. For example, projects that integrate sub-granting most often include more elaborate monitoring frameworks as tools for monitoring of sub-grantees and their projects. Some projects, such as the project 'Strengthening Serbia-EU Civil Society Dialogue' also present a well-developed monitoring system that helps to establish progress against indicators set forth in their results framework, together with a simple reporting system for monitoring visits which proved to be a good example of tracking all implemented activities and results achieved. Other good examples include the two UNDP projects: 'Monitoring and evaluation of Economic and Social Empowerment for Roma and Egyptians - a booster for social inclusion (ESERE)' in Albania and the 'Support to Anti-discrimination and gender equality policies' project in Montenegro which developed its monitoring frameworks in accordance with the UNDP monitoring and evaluation plan.

At the EU level, project managers are formally required to assess progress of all actions against their indicators. This process is widely perceived (by CSOs and by EU staff) as excessively formalistic. Many EU staff express frustration at the low level of contact they have with implementing partners, particularly those based outside capital cities. The Enlargement region has an annual monitoring exercise that focusses on the indicators in the guidelines, and which is intended to engage stakeholders, including CSOs.²³ Challenges within this process include those of associating action-level indicators with those in the guidelines, and also the common challenges of attributing impact to CSO actions.

In the Neighbourhood South, at the level of the instruments, the ENI evaluation report states that 'monitoring and evaluation systems at project and country level provide the required feedback on programmes' implementation'. The cost-effectiveness criteria is mainstreamed into all set of documents, from programming to the calls for proposal.

However, EIDHR's evaluation reports point to weak indicators for measurement of results: 'There is considerable evidence that they are not used systematically to monitor achievements of results'. This statement may apply to the EU CSO capacity development initiative since the evaluation report highlights that 'The various actors involved in the EU support programme did not systematically monitor and/or document the wider effects of the

²³ For more details see https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_zh-hant/52526/Guidelines%20for%20EU%20support%20to%20civil%20society%20in%20enlargement%20countries,%202014-2020

capacity development support provided. The M&E systems in place are largely input and activity driven, with a focus on quantitative data’.

With regard to CSO-LA, the evaluation of this instrument²⁴ considered the introduction of the EU Results Framework (RF) under DCI 2014-2020 to be ‘a *step forward to monitor EU development co-operation*’. However, it should be noted that the RF is ‘*stronger on measuring the quantitative dimension of results than it is on measuring the qualitative side, such as the depth and quality of partnerships formed*’.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, the evaluation found evidence in programming documents that supports the planning of cost-effectiveness monitoring. The Action Fiche for Eastern Partnership CSF (Civil Society Facility) elaborates that ‘[i]n anticipation of the use of financial support to third parties becoming the norm, a qualitative monitoring system needs to be foreseen, with checks in place that would prevent possible doubts on the accountable use of financial support to third parties. Evidence will also need to be collected on the effectiveness of this policy against its set objectives. Ability to capture successes and create synergies between actions to support the successful actors that emerge from small scale support is also much needed to avoid fragmentation of support.’²⁵

At national and local level, there is a widespread perception among CSO interviewees that the EU does not pay sufficient attention to the monitoring of cost-effectiveness in targeted interventions. Civil society interviewees during field missions in Belarus, Armenia and Ukraine suggested that there was an absence of adequate monitoring and other mechanisms to ensure cost-effectiveness of targeted support (in Armenia, this was the case in eight out of eighteen interviewees).

The EU took steps to improve its M&E system during the period covered by this evaluation. A service contract for Technical Assistance on Impact Monitoring of EU Civil Society Support in Eastern Partnership countries is intended to build on existing monitoring systems, and enable the EU to monitor quality of interventions supported by FSTP, including cost-effectiveness.

The EU makes significant efforts to support grant beneficiaries’ improvement of their own monitoring systems. In addition to supporting a range of training initiatives and helpdesks to support grant beneficiaries in PCM, EU staff responsible for managing CfP and grant contracts stated in interviews that they make extensive comments on potentially selected grant beneficiaries’ log frames during contract finalisation. Nevertheless, the results reporting exercise undertaken within the ROM service contract has found log frames and associated monitoring systems (indicators and data collection) to be weak, and additional support is now to be provided under the new ROM service contracts to work with both EUDs and implementing partners to improve the quality of monitoring systems.

Finding 2.6 EU monitoring of mainstreaming of civil society is weak

Although the EU has repeatedly declared that mainstreaming of civil society is a high priority, adequate monitoring systems are not yet in place.

The EU data management system is not conducive to the monitoring of mainstreaming of civil society, as illustrated by the following:

- The CRIS database does not produce a reliable classification of an action as relevant to civil society. Actions focused on capacity development and an enabling environment for civil society may be classified using an appropriate DAC code. However, this code is also very widely used for the classification of any action implemented by a CSO, even if its objective corresponds to another sector of development cooperation.
- There is no possibility in CRIS to classify an action as targeted support and/or mainstreamed support to civil society.

In addition, there are no sections of the ROM reporting template that directly address the relevance of an action to civil society, and its relevance to targeted and/or mainstreamed support.

There is also a shortage of monitoring and evaluation reports that could support the monitoring of mainstreaming. For example, there is little or no consolidated information or analysis of references to civil society in the conditions for sector budget support.

²⁴ *Evaluation of the Development Cooperation Instrument, Mid-term review report of the External Financing Instruments, 2017*

²⁵ Action Fiche for Eastern Partnership CSF (2017).

The evaluators did not identify any CoTE or EUD-level monitoring tool on mainstreaming. While some Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society identified opportunities for, or targets relating to mainstreaming, the evaluators did not identify examples of monitoring reports that would track progress at country level or consolidate such findings at a regional level.

Finally, the evaluation established that, despite efforts to promote mainstreaming, the concept as such is weakly and inconsistently understood by EUD staff and grant beneficiaries in the NEAR countries.

In the case of the **Enlargement region**, for instance, only one document, IPA II CFS - Programme 2018-2019, mentions that the IPA monitoring committee will be 'supported by the Sectoral Monitoring Committees which will ensure a monitoring process at sector level.' This was further reinforced by interviews in which EU staff acknowledged that a common understanding of mainstreaming and how it should be applied, is currently lacking in the region.

In the case of the **Neighbourhood South**, financial mainstreamed support for CSOs would be relatively easy to monitor insofar as many sector budget support contracts include a condition relating to civil society engagement and/or envisage that the partner country will use some of the resources to support civil society and/or associated with one or more actions for complementary activities for CSOs. This can be seen in countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine in particular.

EQ3 (Effectiveness): What have been the effects of the EU's various forms of engagement with civil society?

Summary: The EU's engagement with civil society has been highly effective at enhancing the role of civil society actors in policy dialogue processes, such as policy consultations, networks and national and regional civil society forums. This has been achieved through both financial and non-financial support, although targeted, financial support is sometimes criticised for being too oriented towards EU systems and procedures. In its promotion of mainstreaming of civil society, the EU has begun to focus attention on how to more systematically integrate civil society into all areas of cooperation, as has been occurring in the Neighbourhood South, in particular, over many years. However, feedback suggests that more should be done by the EU to develop the concept and practice of mainstreaming, so that it can become fully integrated into EU cooperation support more generally, thus strengthening the engagement of civil society in society at large, and even in countries where there is shrinking space.

Finding 3.1 **Strengthening the capacity of well-established CSOs to engage in policy dialogue is one of the most effective components of EU support to civil society in the NEAR regions**

In the **Enlargement region**, the EU's role has been critical for CSOs as either beneficiaries or implementing partners. It has increased their capacities in terms of project management and strategic planning and has empowered them to engage more proactively in various societal processes. Although the strongest power still remains in capitals (or in Turkey in Ankara and Istanbul), the increased focus on grassroots and organisations outside capitals is enabling a fairer distribution of capacity across Enlargement candidates and potential candidates.

The EU has been most comfortable engaging with CSOs who, as well as being centrally based in capitals, have a track record of implementing donor funded projects and engaging in central level policy processes. For these actors, EU support has been particularly effective at strengthening their role as key players in government policy, or in a watchdog function. EU support has enabled this group to provide more quality inputs in policy processes, both at local and national levels. This confirms the finding of the Mid-Term Evaluation of CSF, which notes that 'differences exist between centrally based and those organisations outside of capitals [or other types of] grassroots organisations'²⁶.

The story is similar when it comes to networking among civil society organisations. This has brought about positive results for civil society engagement in policy dialogue, also offering space for peer learning and

²⁶ European Commission (2017); *Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey*. 26
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exchange²⁷ although the extent to which network leaders are willing and able to share information with network members outside capitals can vary²⁸.

All projects sampled for this evaluation anticipate results in terms of enhanced capacities of organisations and their constituencies and improved practices thanks to project interventions.

Projects that engage in social dialogue or that support other types of civil society actors beyond the grant-dependent NGO type, particularly through CSF or EIDHR, are a small part of the EU portfolio. This limits the effectiveness in achieving EU objectives at the grassroots level.

The successful combination of targeted support to capacity building, and policy dialogue was evident in the **Neighbourhood South** where the most effective results were seen amongst those CSOs who have been able to develop their capacity to act as independent actors of development and governance in their own right, primarily in the field of human rights, and following a rights-based approach.

Such organisations, including Médecins du Monde (Palestine, Morocco), Handicap International - Humanity and Inclusion (Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine), or Samusocial International (Egypt) have generally engaged in a long-term development process, often through partnership with an INGO or through successive EU support; and are also those who are most involved in policy dialogue. These results have been primarily achieved through integrated civil society support programmes which are focussed on a smaller number of organisations and which are tailored to their particular needs, thus creating a stronger effect. In contrast, more one-off training support is regarded as less effective. Documentation reviewed in the evaluation suggests that the effect of such training is limited to the individual level, primarily at the participants of the training, rather than strengthening organisations as a whole.

In this region, the comprehensive support programmes to civil society since 2012 have been particularly effective at improving access to non-financial support through increased allocation of resources, even to the benefit of grassroots CSOs, and also sometimes through financial support when a funding mechanism is included in the programme (e.g. in Lebanon). Due to their improved design and outreach opportunities since the Arab Spring, regional programmes have improved engagement with youth movements in some countries (Morocco).

Across the **Neighbourhood East**, capacity building is recognised as a major achievement of EU support. In Georgia, in particular, EU engagement with civil society strengthened the entire sector, leading to increased involvement with cooperation programme design, implementation and monitoring. Furthermore, greater capacity is now reported across the country with CSOs from smaller towns and localities more actively involved at all levels.

In Ukraine, civil society stakeholders highlighted results achieved through EU engagement on management, fundraising and policy engagement competences of CSOs. In Belarus, the evaluation found that CSO capacity is the most noticeable effect of EU engagement, and notably in areas perceived as less 'politicised' such as environment, gender equality and volunteering.

The criticism that capacity building has sometimes focussed too much on technical competency to conduct bilateral relations with the EU and its member states, rather than community outreach and civil society constituency work, was an observation from the East that reinforces the finding here that the capacity building achievements are visible mostly within larger CSOs.

Finding 3.2 Support to civil society on 'non-controversial' themes has been effective in improving civil society engagement in countries where there is a 'shrinking space'

Related to the findings on engagement within countries with a shrinking space for civil society (see Finding 1.3 and 3.1), such as in Belarus, this evaluation has found that mainstreaming of civil society in sectors that are not typically associated with CSO activity has been an effective means by which civil society can continue and strengthen its ability to engage in public life without being under the spotlight of government. This includes EU engagement with civil society on non-controversial themes (which, depending on the local context, may include children's rights, disability, rural development, or women's economic empowerment) even in some contexts where the legislative, regulatory and political space for civil society is shrinking. Support to service provider CSOs to develop fact-based lobbying has also been more sustainable than support to donor-dependent governance-focused CSOs.

²⁷ Center for Promotion of Civil society and TACSO (2012); *Assessment Report on advocacy capacity of membership based CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina*; <http://civilnodrustvo.ba/media/26121/assessment-report-on-advocacy-capacity-of-membership-based-csos-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-2012.pdf>

²⁸ European Commission (2015); *Impact Assessment of IPA 2012 Grant Scheme for Supporting Issue-based Networks in Bosnia and Herzegovina*; https://europa.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Complete-Final-Report_Impact-assesment-of-IPA-2012-grant-scheme_NGO-networks_November-2016.pdf

The EU has also had some success in ‘confidence building’ with authoritarian regimes via engagement on non-controversial themes with CSOs considered as close to the political elite. Such cooperation may for example help consolidate the legitimacy of non-state engagement in social inclusion and social protection. Examples of elite CSO engagement on violence against women and girls in Palestine and Morocco, child trafficking in Egypt and Lebanon, and social protection in Jordan, Egypt and Morocco can be observed in the Neighbourhood South.

Despite a particularly unfavourable context for civil society in most countries in the region in 2009 (almost complete closure in Syria and Libya, very limited space in Algeria and Jordan, very controlled in Tunisia and Egypt), the ENP progress reports highlight areas where governmental authorities consulted civil society in the process of public policy making, as a result of EU support. This is particularly the case in the field of social protection, with the Ministry of Social Services (MoSS) as the main interlocutor, but also independent public organisations or charities, presided over by First Ladies or a member of the ruling family (e.g. in Jordan, Egypt and Morocco). Consequently, the strategy for the protection of women in Palestine and Morocco or the child protection strategy in Egypt and Lebanon (child trafficking) – all supported by the EU - has been traditionally subject to consultation with civil society. Policy dialogue between civil society and government has been possible even in restrictive contexts, on non-sectoral policies centred on a specific category of population (women and children), which is overseen by a government body that selects the organisations with which it wishes to interact. One of the success factors for this type of meaningful engagement is that the issues on the agenda are not considered politically sensitive.

Engagement with elite CSOs carries a risk of elite capture of EU funds and is often highly unpopular with pro-Western CSOs. Common concerns relate to the risk of legitimising the authoritarian legislative regulatory and political environment for civil society, and the domination of civil society-EU dialogue by elite CSOs in a context of self-censorship and denunciation of critical CSOs by pro-regime civil society activists.

Finding 3.3 The EU’s efforts to enhance the enabling environment have continued, but success is mixed and depends largely on factors outside of the EU’s control

In the **Enlargement region**, the EU was very vocal in its aim to support government efforts to enhance an enabling environment for development of CSOs. This included development of units and mechanisms for cooperation with civil society, policy dialogue towards increasing transparency and access to government fund for CSOs, etc.

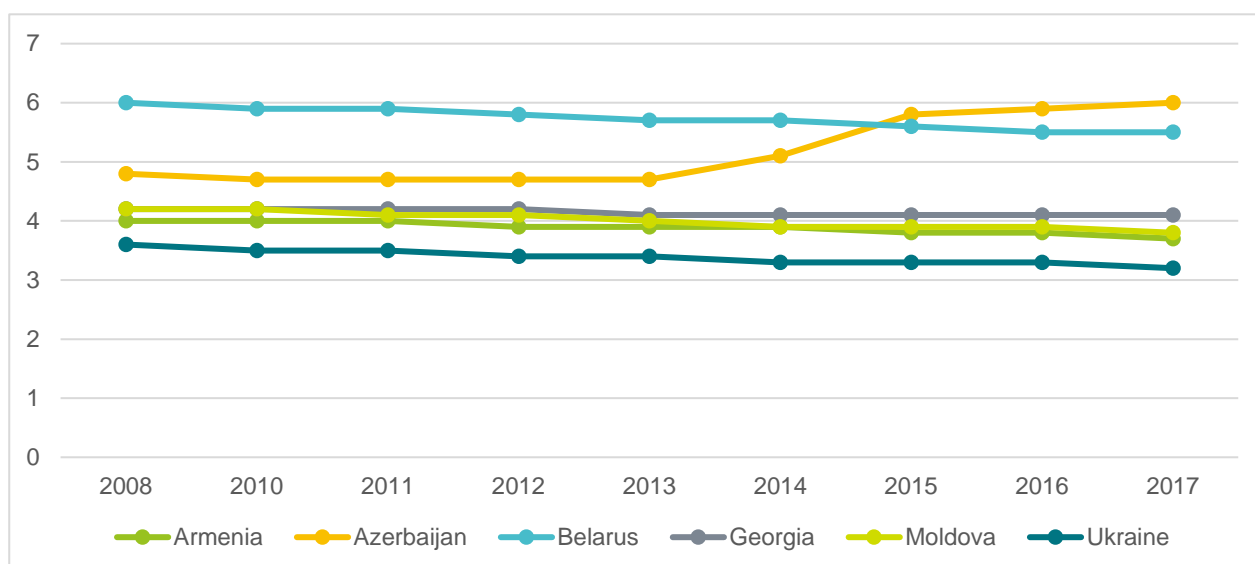
Review of EU progress/country reports, and reports on civil society across the region show some positive shifts, and a steady cooperation between civil society and authorities at a national and local level, the exception to which is Turkey, which faces ever stronger repression of civil society and challenges in the work of civil society actors. One of the challenges affecting the quality and occurrence of government-civil society dialogue is the lack of professionalised organisations within many sectors, as also confirmed by this evaluation.

In the **Neighbourhood South** countries, where policy dialogue between civil society and the authorities is limited due to a lack of civic space, the EU has strived to promote an enabling environment for CSOs through political and diplomatic dialogue with the authorities, and to adjust its support to priorities, negotiated and agreed upon by the EU and the country partner. This situation does, however, generate a tension for the EU in that it must, on the one hand, cooperate with states that restrict the action of civil society whilst, on the other hand, engage with them on democratisation goals.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, for those countries where national authorities undertake specific commitments regarding good governance in bilateral relations with the EU, such as AA/CEPA countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia), an improvement in the enabling environment for civil society was observed throughout the evaluation period. This can be seen in the USAID/CIVICUSCSO Sustainability Index for EaP countries (2008-2017). The USAID CSO Sustainability Index measures the sustainability of civil society sector based on seven dimensions: legal environment, organisational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. In the ratings, lower numbers indicate more robust levels of CSO sustainability²⁹. Figure 27 shows that, overall, the sustainability of CSOs has grown steadily throughout the evaluation period, with notable improvements in five countries, except Azerbaijan.

²⁹ The CSO Sustainability Index uses a seven-point scale from 1 to 7, mirroring those used by Freedom House in its publications ‘Nations in Transit’ and ‘Freedom in the World’. Lower numbers indicate more robust levels of CSO sustainability. These characteristics and levels are drawn from empirical observations of the sector’s development in the region, rather than a causal theory of development. Given the decentralised nature of civil society sectors, many contradictory developments may be taking place simultaneously. The levels of sustainability are organised into three broad clusters: Sustainability Enhanced (1 to 3) - the highest level of sustainability, corresponds to a score between 1.0 and 3.0; sustainability Evolving (3.1 to 5) - corresponds to a score between 3.1 and 5.0; sustainability Impeded (5.1 to 7) – the lowest level of sustainability, corresponds to a score between 5.1 and 7.

Figure 27 Trends in sustainability of CSOs in the Neighbourhood East, 2008-2017



Source: Landell Mills' analysis of USAID CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia reports, 2008 to 2017

Sustainability enhanced		Sustainability evolving		Sustainability impeded	
1.0-2.0	2.1-3.0	3.1-4	4.1-5	5.1-6	6.1-7

Roadmaps for Belarus and Azerbaijan (2014-2018) emphasise the influence that national and international policies have on the results that can be expected through EU engagement, going as far as saying that national authorities have the power to slow down or even halt achievement of results.

This can be seen in Azerbaijan, where the national authorities have virtually halted the operation of independent CSOs and thus the results achieved by the EU in its engagement with them, and by the actions of the Ukrainian government where, in 2014, its actions relating to the Euromaidan revolution have threatened the achievement of results under all forms of civil society engagement.

Finding 3.4 The EU has promoted the mainstreaming of civil society across all sectors of support, but the extent to which this occurs systematically, and how, varies widely

The EU defines mainstreaming as 'systematically involving and consulting civil society in all sectors of support interventions and policy dialogue' and it promotes mainstreaming through approaches such as 'granting improved access to information to CSOs, to consulting CSOs on specific policies or programmes, and ensuring their active involvement as equal partners in the decision-making or in the provision of services'.³⁰

The concept of mainstreaming of civil society is not new, and it has been occurring over the entire period of the evaluation in various forms. For example, even before 2012, in the **Neighbourhood South**, there were a number of sectors in which programmes were implemented with a civil society component, mainly through regional programmes which were highly effective at stimulating dialogue and cooperation between regional partners. After 2012, however, reference to civil society in the EU country Action Plans has become more systematic.

The EUD survey and the interviews conducted during this evaluation shows a common understanding of CS mainstreaming as the systematic involvement and consultation with civil society in all sectors of support interventions and policy dialogue. Important ways that civil society mainstreaming has taken place in the region are:

- systematic reference to civil society in the priority sectors of the EU country Action Plans, which has increased over time;
- inclusion of a funding mechanism (mainly Action Grants through CfP) for civil society in specific sectors, in relation to its service provider role;
- participation of civil society in developing policy, budget support, though consultations and national meetings.

³⁰ Guidance note on mainstreaming, EC, DG NEAR

In Morocco and Tunisia, a sectoral approach is taken by the EUD, whereby sector leads work in conjunction with Human Rights and the Civil Society Focal Point in the EUD. In Palestine, however, a multi-sectoral approach is taken for each territory (e.g. East Jerusalem, Area C, Gaza) although the sectoral approach is sometimes followed in areas where there is a high level of technical capacity amongst some CSOs in the sector, e.g. in water and agriculture.

In the **Enlargement region**, document review and interviews revealed that mainstreaming is understood differently by different actors. All interviewed actors understand mainstreaming as ensuring that CSOs are consulted in sectoral programming, although the Evaluation of the Sector approach under IPA II found that this has not so far been very effective: 'IPA II placed great importance on civil society's involvement in sector approach processes. In practice, civil society organisations were engaged in sector approach forums such as sector working groups and sector monitoring committees only formally, but the quality of their engagement was generally poor. As a result, these organisations (with few exceptions) were sceptical of the sector approach as an effective vehicle for integrating their views into programming and perceived their own participation in its forums as having little value to them'³¹.

However, when it comes to systematic involvement of CSOs in sectoral interventions, the evaluation did not find such a common understanding or practice across the region, although some successful cases were found. For example, in public finance management (PFM) and public administration reform (PAR) reforms, and particularly in anti-corruption, CSO involvement contributed to the investigating and reporting of corruption. In other sectors, such as education, social policy or environment, positive results were achieved by CSOs, mainly in the area of raising public awareness on issues, monitoring policies and also in the field of social inclusion, provision of social services, for example in Montenegro. In Turkey, document review of a sampled project in the field of environment did not provide any insight in engagement with civil society or results. Where they can play a watchdog role in monitoring reforms, CSOs have also been encouraged and supported to participate in various sectors. For example, a network of organisations received support from EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina to monitor anti-corruption measures. The Mid-Term Evaluation also notes that, for example, 'support to the projects KULT^{32,33} and Nasa Djeca³⁴ ('Our Children')³⁵ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of the Network 23³⁶ in the Republic of North Macedonia, had strong components of policy-making and monitoring of implementation of relevant policies, which were effectively implemented'.

This results in more systematic engagement with CSOs in programming and consultations, but rather erratic inclusion of CSOs and CSO interventions within different sectors. In summary, while guidance has been provided to EU Delegations on mainstreaming of support in all their activities, the effectiveness of this form of support is not yet highly visible in the Enlargement region.

In the **Eastern Neighbourhood**, the EUD in Moldova has been the most systematic in integration of CSOs into budget support, often by making multi-stakeholder dialogue one of the conditions for disbursement of tranches of budget support.

In addition, all 'first generation' Roadmaps (2014-2017) make references to mainstreaming as a distinct form of engagement.

- **Armenia** - CSOs were consulted on the 2014-2020 programming cycle as well as on thematic programmes (Armenia 2014-2017 Roadmap) with good responses from local civil society.
- **Azerbaijan** - mainstreaming occupies a less prominent space but there is evidence of active responses to mainstreaming in a few sectors, such as rural development and PFM, but with EUD's assistance to building capacity of local CSOs to engage.
- **Belarus** – notes that mainstreaming helps obtain up-to-date information about the state of civil society but fails to outline specific sectors concerned.
- **Georgia** - notes that mainstreaming is taking place in all key sectors of EU programming including justice reform, PFM, agriculture, education and regional development, with active CSO contributions and permanent consultation structures involving the government.

³¹ European Commission (2018); Evaluation of Sector approach under IPA II; p. 26 http://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-k/gde/18/SA_IPA_II_eval_Vol_1_final_on_19_March.pdf

³² Contract number: 310583

³³ <http://www.mladi.org/index.php?lang=en>

³⁴ Contract number: 310808

³⁵ <http://nasadjeca.ba>

³⁶ Contract number: 333780

- **Moldova** - identifies key focal sectors for mainstreaming, notably public administration reform; agriculture and rural development; and police reform and border management, but there is no evidence of active and structured local component involving the government.
- **Ukraine** - links mainstreaming to Association Agreement implementation and stipulates support measures for civil society involvement across most EU programming sectors.

An analysis of CfP organised during the period covered by this evaluation provides some evidence for mainstreaming. Although 52% of CfP focus on capacity development and promotion of an enabling environment for civil society, and on promotion of a wide range of human rights and on governance issues, at least 48% of CfP related to other sectors, including agriculture and rural development, economic development, social protection and integration, education and environmental protection. These sectors could be considered as those where the EU has been most successful in mainstreaming grant support for civil society, outside the well-established governance, democracy and human rights sectors. The thematic distribution of CfP is presented in the following table.

Figure 28 Thematic focus of EU CfP in NEAR regions in 2013-2018

Region	Sector	FSTP allowed	Only some Lots	FSTP not allowed	Grand Total
Enlargement candidates	Governance, democracy, human rights and gender equality	54	5	39	98
	Rural development, Agriculture	7		3	10
	Economic development	5		9	14
	Social inclusion/protection	5	2	11	18
	Justice	1		7	8
	Culture	1			1
	Environment	1		7	8
	Media	9	1	3	13
	Education	1		2	3
	Conflict and post-conflict	3		4	7
	European integration	1		9	10
	Cross-border cooperation	2		7	9
	Research			2	2
	Civil defence	3		1	4
	Other			1	1
	Total	93	8	105	206
Neighbourhood East	Governance, democracy, human rights and gender equality	43	1	4	48
	Rural development, Agriculture	10			10
	Economic development	1			1
	Justice	4		2	6
	Media	1			1
	Education	4		2	6
	Conflict and post-conflict	1			1
	Research	2			2
	Migration	1		1	2
	Total	67	1	9	77
Neighbourhood South	Governance, democracy, human rights and gender equality	48	3	12	63
	Rural development, Agriculture	6			6
	Economic development	6	1		7
	Social inclusion/protection	2	1		3
	Justice	2		3	5
	Culture	8		8	16
	Environment	4		3	7
	Education	3		1	4
	Conflict and post-conflict	1		1	2
	Research	1		3	4
	Other	1		2	3
	Migration	1			1
	Total	83	5	33	121
Grand Total		243	14	147	404

Source: Landell Mills' analysis of Guidelines for Applicants in 412 CfPs launched in the NEAR countries covered by this evaluation in 2013-2018

The analysis of contracted funds presented in Chapter 4 provides further evidence of mainstreaming. As we have shown, the volume and proportion of EU support actually contracted to targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society is higher than the indicative commitments. It is difficult to explain this 'excess' other than as the result of a non-coordinated mainstreaming of support to civil society across EU headquarters and EUDIF services.

Actions implemented by CSOs under the Instrument for Stability (IFS) or IcSP and Partnership Instrument (PI) are likely to constitute mainstreamed support, since these instruments promote common interests of the EU and partner countries. In contrast, the capacity strengthening focus common to the geographical programme, CSO-LA and EIDHR results in a mixture of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society.

Finding 3.5 **Regional policy dialogue has been an important initiative, with limitations to its effectiveness which have been more recently addressed**

In the **Neighbourhood South**, the period 2011-2014 was characterised by multiple structured dialogue initiatives at the global level. These operated through a silo approach, with each policy/instrument establishing its own dialogue mechanism with a comparable *modus operandi*, based on the European civil society networks structured around EU policy (Concord, HRDN, EPLO). Since 2016, these global forums have attempted to integrate a regional dimension by establishing geographically-based working groups, including ENP South. The EU relies on these European networks of NGOs and, by extension, on their members to be able to mobilise and select relevant CSOs from the countries concerned.

CSO survey responses appreciate the resumption of regional dialogue and underline its importance. Nevertheless, the evaluation team's observation at the CS Forum South in Brussels in 2016 and 2018, along with key stakeholder interviews, suggest that the EU's attempts to engage in a structured dialogue with the CS of the ENP South have not had significant effects, for the following reasons:

- There is little continuity between each Forum as different organisations participate in each. Although this makes it possible to reach a larger number of organisations that are given the opportunity to express themselves, it makes it more difficult to follow up and strengthen recommendations.
- There is low understanding of the objectives of the Forum by the CSO participants, difference in expectations of EU staff and CSO representatives, and a difficult articulation between the national and regional levels of representation and dialogue.
- There is a lack of civil society capacity for dialogue at the regional level, resulting from a low knowledge of EU structures and initiatives and a low capacity to produce strategic inputs at the regional level. Most participants find it difficult to rise above the specificities of their own countries.

A real qualitative leap was made between 2016 and 2017 with the constitution of thematic groups, which have yielded a higher quality of engagement and which are receiving more attention from the Commission. This is illustrated by taking into account the recommendations on the promotion and protection of LGBT rights, through the launch by the EU of a regional (confidential) programme under the EIDHR, the contract for which is expected in 2019.

The last phase of the structured dialogue between the EU and the CSOs in the ENP South started in 2018 with the 'regional hub', a grant-funded programme led by a consortium of North and South NGOs and networks, and renamed as Majalat. This grant framework corresponds to the demand of the main regional CSO networks (Euromed Rights, ANND, Solidar) to lead the conduct of the dialogue process. This 3-year programme is seen as an opportunity to go beyond a stand-alone event, introducing more continuity and ownership.

EQ4 (Impact): *To what extent have the EU's various forms of engagement with civil society contributed to the enhancement of participatory and inclusive democratic governance?*

Summary: The long-term impacts of the EU's engagement with civil society vary across the regions of this evaluation, reflecting the differing political objectives that have governed its support to its Neighbourhood and Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and partners. In the Neighbourhood South, the EU's integrated approach, which has adapted to dramatic political changes over time, has contributed to the 'professionalisation' of CSOs enabling them to act independently and credibly across a range of civil society interests, and CSOs have been particularly successful when they have benefited from long-term support, combined with advocacy and policy dialogue opportunities. In the Enlargement region, the EU accession has provided a framework for civil society engagement, and the EU has strongly promoted and supported civil society as an integral part of the IPA instrument, ensuring an active role in the enlargement process. At the same time, the EU has encouraged governments to put in place legislation and policy to improve government's recognition of civil society, and enhance their cooperation, although these are not yet established firmly enough to ensure long-term sustainability, as evidence from the situation in Turkey illustrates. In the Neighbourhood East, the EU's engagement with civil society has been significant in increasing the capacity of civil society organisations. This was most notable in the field of policy consultations and dialogue both at national and bilateral and international level, where civil society organisations' competences have increased across the board. The EU's structured approach to involving CSOs in policymaking has helped raise the profile and significance of civil society in policy dialogues in most Eastern Partnership countries.

Finding 4.1 In the Neighbourhood South, the EU has supported the professionalisation of CSOs, enabling them to become independent actors in democratic processes

Considering the long-term effects of the EU's engagement with civil society, the literature review and the various consultation activities conducted with CSOs and EUDs in this evaluation show that the main long-term outcome achieved through targeted support over the period is the enhanced quality of input and engagement of CSOs in policy and oversight processes resulting from increased level of professionalisation of the CSOs, particularly in representing and tackling rights of the most vulnerable in society.

In the Neighbourhood South, this evaluation has found that the EU's support has strongly contributed to the professionalisation of CSOs. This has two defining features: 1) a rationalised approach to CSO activities, with established results-based management and communication systems; and 2) an increasing reliance on paid employees within the organisation.

This phenomenon is highlighted in the thematic country assessments conducted up until 2014 which show that the EU's CSO capacity building support has focused mainly on strengthening the operational capacities of organisations, enabling them to deliver activities or services, to absorb funds in order to do so, and to report on EU-funded projects. These capacities have enabled these CSOs to perform a role as quality service providers to the most vulnerable, and to become effective at fundraising and sustainable. The high level of professionalisation was already recognised in 2008 in ROM reports, especially in Palestine³⁷ and Lebanon³⁸, and is also described in programme evaluation reports as in Algeria on small segments of civil society (child welfare)³⁹.

Although the level of professionalisation of CSOs varies from one country to another depending on the historical trajectories of civil society in each country, all of the Neighbourhood South countries have experienced a boom in the non-profit sector since the 1990s. CSOs provide quality services and play a crucial role vis-à-vis marginalised populations. These associations operate either in partnership with the State services (providing complementary services, legitimating and at the same time providing critical feedback to state institutions), or autonomously via the support of international cooperation.

From the countries visited within this evaluation, a number of key examples stand out. In Morocco, the professionalisation process seems to be limited to intermediary organisations (see Finding 3.1) as is more recently the case in Jordan. Overall exchanges with the EUDs in these two countries show the significant difference between a small number of capital-based organisations and the majority of organisations located in the regions. Although this issue, which has been identified for attention in the CS Roadmap, still persists, there are also success stories in this country.

For example, in the disability sector, continuous support to Handicap International Federation (HIF) has resulted in the development of stronger, long-term capacity amongst this organisation's local partners. HIF and its partners were among the organisations that received the most action grants over the evaluation period. The distinctiveness of their approach was that they partnered with local CSOs in a rights-based approach which combined the provision of support services with advocacy activities, and facilitated networking in order to address policy issues. The longevity of the intervention of HIF in the region has allowed the creation and strengthening of local civil society organizations and networks (e.g. in Morocco⁴⁰, Algeria, Tunisia⁴¹). Highly trained and technically qualified, they adopt the same right-based approach with regard to their membership and their advocacy-oriented operations⁴².

Due to its operational strength (managing EU funds through a team of trained employees) and institutional capabilities, there is a strong sense that civil society has become a key actor of local governance in the area of disability, being involved in the provision of services, whilst also having the ability to network at a national level and perform a strategic role as agents of change, defining long-term goals and intermediate steps by positioning and adapting to the political and institutional environment.

Other successes in Morocco related to the feminist movement. While the trajectory for its development differs to that of disability, it is again the continuity of EU support to its organisations over a long period that has

³⁷ Palestine: Protecting trade union rights and uniting efforts to influence socio economic policies, EIDHR, 2008

³⁸ Action de Prévention et de Réhabilitation des Victimes de la Torture et autres Mauvais Traitements, durant leur Garde à Vue, leur Détention Provisoire et leur Incarcération, EIDHR, 2008

³⁹ Mission d'évaluation finale du projet d'appui aux associations algériennes de développement (ONG II), 2011 ;

⁴⁰ The NGO - Colombes Blanches – in Tetouan (North Morocco) and the « Collectif pour la promotion des droits des personnes en situation de handicap (CHDM), both funded by the EU.

⁴¹ « Organisation Tunisienne de Défense des Droits des Personnes en situation de Handicap » and « Collectif Tunisien pour la promotion des droits des personnes en situation de handicap »

⁴² Evaluation of the USAID-funded programme: 'Strengthening CSOs capacity to promote democratic reforms in Morocco' (SANAD), 2013; Evaluation finale externe du Programme Concerté Pluri-Acteurs en Tunisie (AFD), 2018

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contributed to its success in delivering evidence-based advocacy and public policy work which has allowed it to influence legislative reforms and policy implementation.

Significant progress has been recorded in the so-called transitioning countries such as Tunisia (transition completed) and Morocco (gradual transitioning), countries in which the EU has been able to provide a significant variety of its forms of engagement and modalities of support to civil society.

In the countries visited during the evaluation (Palestine, Morocco, Israel), the impact of EU support is all the more important when it is long-term, and combines service delivery and advocacy; and when it combines activism with professionalism.

In all cases, CSO initiatives help to shed light on a range of public issues that are little or weakly dealt with by the public authorities who, eventually, address them in the context of reforms. CSOs are particularly avant-garde in promoting and protecting human rights and rights of women, child, migrants and refugees, people with disability, etc.

Finding 4.2 Civil society in the Enlargement region is better equipped to participate in policy dialogue and support rights of its constituencies

Across the Enlargement region, civil society has become more engaged in policy making processes and EU accession negotiations, although to varying levels across Enlargement candidates and potential candidates. The conditions for this engagement have been built through long-term support from the EU and other development partners in capacity building of civil society, on one side, and an investment in improving the enabling environment for civil society on the other. Support to civil society through EU interventions has improved the quality of civil society's inputs and insights through better organisational capacity, advocacy and watchdog roles; and EU technical assistance to, and policy dialogue with governments has helped to raise awareness and recognition of civil society's role in service provision and in policy processes. With some variations evident in document review and stakeholder interviews, this has brought transformative effects in the ways and mechanisms through which civil society is engaged and consulted.

Across the region, civil society engagement is cumulatively higher and, cases such as Serbia, it is well organised (through National Convent). In Montenegro, Albania and to a lesser extent in North Macedonia, CSOs have a strong advocacy and engagement role across sectors, most notably in the field of governance, public administration reform and social development. Civil society also takes a strong role as service provider, particularly for the most vulnerable groups (e.g. minorities, persons with disabilities, youth, women, etc.). Some challenges have been noted by key informants, however, and are mainly linked to the varying levels of capacity and quality of civil society engagement, with more pronounced engagement in the capital and larger centres than in smaller centres elsewhere. The EU and USAID have invested significant efforts in establishing and strengthening CSO networks (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina), which have increased engagement and peer learning among civil society actors, though challenged by varying capacities of CSOs in the capital vs. those of organisations in smaller communities. In Turkey, civil society participation is challenged by the increasingly volatile political situation and related challenges.

The evaluation found positive trends in the ways that civil society operates and is recognised by governments. Looking back at the period between 2007 and 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina has marked a tangible progress, such as the creation of e-consultation web platforms which have been developed in order to ensure dialogue and cooperation with CSOs. However, Bosnia remains the only country in the region which has not managed to adopt strategies for cooperation with civil society throughout the reference period of this evaluation. Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo have experienced mostly slow but tangible progress concerning the involvement of civil society in the legislative process. Serbia's civil society has significantly increased its professionalisation and also sector expertise, with a stronger role in the EU accession negotiation process; however, systemic cooperation between government and civil society in the legislative process is still weak, and challenged by shrinking political space for civil society and media. Due to its specific political situation, Turkey comes as an exception in the overall picture of civil society in the Enlargement region, with the positive trend between 2007 and 2013 then reversed since 2013 with the Gazi Protest and ensuing political complexities.

Finding 4.3 While EU support has influenced governments to improve their cooperation with civil society in the Enlargement region through stronger legislation and mechanisms, the enabling environment remains fragile and depends highly on political will

The EU has driven the creation of an enabling environment for civil society, as confirmed through document review and stakeholder interviews. EU support for a more conducive environment for civil society was channelled through assistance in development/establishment of mechanisms and institutional structures, and legislative/policy solutions. Good examples are found across the region, through improved consultation mechanisms and access to information, and institutional solutions (offices or units for civil society) and strategic frameworks for cooperation with civil society. However, these mechanisms are still fragile. For instance, countries such as Serbia and Turkey encounter shrinking civil society space and the closing down of dialogue with civil society.

Similar results can be seen in the policy sphere, where the EU's involvement has been continuously high, and which has resulted in a strong foundation for civil society to engage and be(come) effective as actors in civic and governance realms. Across the region (except Turkey), civil society engages more dynamically in policy making processes and is increasingly seen as a partner of government. Similarly to the enabling environment, these foundations are still fragile and dependent on many factors, including government commitment to participatory decision making and civil society sectoral expertise and capacity. Besides, this evaluation confirms the 2012 Evaluation of EU support to civil society finding that 'sustainability prospects also depend to a large extent on the overall democratisation processes in the countries in the region, and the full adoption and implementation of good governance standards.'⁴³

Finding 4.4 In the Eastern Neighbourhood, EU support has strengthened civil society's capacity to participate in policy dialogue

The EU has invested efforts in continuous dialogue with governments to include civil society in various processes, stemming from the EC commitment laid out in the above mentioned 2012 Communication, both on a bilateral basis and when bringing the countries together.

There have been some small positive changes recorded in Armenia most recently, with the shift in composition of government. Democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia achieved in recent years have also resulted in a more enabling environment for civil society, sustained over the last few years. According to local CSO interviewees in Georgia and Ukraine, many changes in the enabling environment, instilled with EU's assistance, are irreversible and will be sustained regardless of donor involvement. One Ukrainian CSO respondent lists a number of sustainable achievements: 'We can say EU programming contributed to development of more enabling environment for civil society. Civil society can enjoy less barriers in legal registration, access to information, budget support from local budgets (especially social service CSOs), participation in decision making at both national and regional levels. The voice of CSOs is better heard.'

However, these changes are fragile and dependent on political factors that are beyond the control of the EU or the civil society sector. For example, in Moldova, the issue of vulnerability and reversibility of reforms can be seen in the recent political instability, which also resulted in attempts to limit the space for civil society. In Azerbaijan, the situation of civil society also deteriorated significantly in the last few years (see Finding 3.3) and the EU's engagement with civil society and government had little influence on the situation, despite addressing human rights abuses at all levels and suspending some forms of cooperation (e.g. budget support). One Azerbaijani CSO survey respondent noted 'there is no enabling environment for civil society in Azerbaijan and it means that all actors, including civil society, EU, USAID and others failed. At least the EU is able to somehow support civil society organizations in order to help them to survive from this hard situation'.

⁴³ European Commission (2012); *Thematic Evaluation of EU's Support to Civil Society in the Western Balkans* (namely, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, Montenegro and Serbia) and Turkey 2012 (link: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/financial_assistance/phare/evaluation/2012_eval_cs_final_report_2.pdf), p. 29
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EQ5 (Sustainability and Ownership): *To what extent have the changes to which EU support have contributed proved to be sustainable after the end of EU funding?*

Summary: The EU engages mostly with CSOs who have remained for the most part donor dependent in the period covered by this evaluation. However, civil society as a whole shows a gradual increase in sustainability. The EU has contributed to mitigating negative developments in the enabling environment and assisting CSOs in adapting. Modest improvements in the enabling environment have taken place in some countries and these can be associated with EU support to CSOs and to partner country governments.

Finding 5.1 **EU support strengthens the conditions for civil society to survive, even in shrinking spaces**

As indicated elsewhere in this report, the political context and absorption capacity of governments to take on and implement standards for civil society engagement strongly influences the quality and level of participation of civil society in public dialogue at any given time. For instance, across the **Enlargement region**, important results have been achieved in terms of the legislative and policy environment. Institutional foundations for cooperation with civil society have been created, including those provided to support enlargement negotiations, thanks to EU support. However, their sustainability across the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates is still fragile. It will depend on the political context and the absorption capacity and level of commitment of governments to utilise and upgrade these new structures to support democratic and participatory governance processes. Concretely, there are varying levels of ‘tolerance’ of civil society across the Western Balkans, with pressure visible in some cases, such as most recently in Serbia. In Turkey, there has been serious backsliding regarding the development of Civil Society, particularly since 2018.⁴⁴ Civil society in this country experienced increasing pressure, following the high number of detentions and arrests of civil society activists, human rights defenders or investigative journalists, and the EU has responded to this situation, as described in EQ1.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, as described in EQ3, in countries such as Belarus, the EU has also managed to support countries despite such conditions, for example by facilitating dialogue outside of the country. The EU’s diplomatic stance also had some impact on freeing political prisoners and preventing further shrinking (e.g. new legislation on taxation for the unemployed and economically inactive).

In the **Neighbourhood South**, the evaluation has also found that the sustainability of the results achieved through the EU’s support and engagement is fragile, with continuous reference to shrinking civic space in the region.

In **Russia**, the most favourable legal environment governing CSO activities in Russia was observed between 2009-2011, marked by the amendments introduced into the Russian Law on NGOs⁴⁵ under the then President of the Russian Federation, Dmitrii Medvedev. During this period EU-Russia relations were shaped by a relatively more positive mutual willingness to cooperate, and the EU-Russia regular political dialogue contributed to the enabling environment for civil society during that time. However, the restrictive package of legislation introduced from 2012 to 2018 had sought to reverse the trend seen in earlier years⁴⁶. The deterioration in political relations between the EU and Russia since 2013 has contributed to the EU’s reduced leverage over the developments in the civic sphere in Russia. The Russian respondents to the survey of civil society are unanimous in providing a negative assessment of the current state of affairs with regard to the role of the EU in supporting the enabling environment for the Russian civil society.

Finding 5.2 **The impact of EU support is limited by the short-term or ad-hoc nature of contracts that do not allow for extension or phase-out planning, and these can reduce the ability of CSOs to sustain the benefits of EU support in the long-term**

This evaluation has found that the EU’s support to civil society through capacity building has been one of its most important achievements. However, civil society requires ongoing support in all its various forms in order to become an established governance actor.

Initiatives related to capacity building, advocacy and policy work require long term, iterative support that can adapt to processes of change, both in the political economy of the country and the sector. Building the legitimacy and expertise that is required to effectively engage in dialogue with public authorities does not happen overnight, and requires sustained support. The EU’s procurement processes do not necessarily support this kind of

⁴⁴ Turkey EU Country Report, 2018

⁴⁵ The 2009 amendments reversed to some extent the restrictions introduced in 2006 to the Russian Law on NGOs

⁴⁶ According to the CIVICUS Monitor, the Russian environment for civil society is classified as repressive in 2018.

<https://civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/3640-new-report-6-in-10-countries-now-seriously-repressing-civic-freedoms>

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ongoing support and this is particularly problematic for smaller CSOs, and especially when they receive one-off support. For such organisations, particularly when receiving EU funding for the first time, the amount of funding may be greater than usual, thus challenging the CSO's absorption capacity, both during implementation and afterwards, as trained staff cannot be sustained once funding stops. Such risks are not so great, however, for larger organisations that already have a high level of capacity and a greater diversity of financial partners.

In the **Enlargement region**, the EU has been the single largest donor extending support to civil society. In a context of uneven government funding to CSOs, and a lack of transparency, and where there is minimal philanthropic or private sector support, the EU is able to address an important gap in terms of assisting CSO operations. Although the EU's premise is that investment in capacities is an input that should increase sustainability prospects in the long-term, this is more difficult to apply in contexts where no other sources of funding are available.

Currently, a weakness of EU project level support, as evidenced by the data collected through document review and stakeholder interviews, is the fact that most supported projects have a short duration (1-3 years) which is not long enough to achieve a significant impact in this sector. The average length of projects has increased in recent years. Often, there are no built-in sustainability/phasing out measures, as evidenced by the review of sampled interventions and stakeholder interviews. There are some specific projects financed to promote philanthropy and an enabling environment which support the financial sustainability of CSOs, but progress in these areas is slow. Many CSOs remain very largely dependent on donor funding. In the **Neighbourhood South**, EUD staff confirmed that phasing out plans are required in proposals and should be articulated in final reports, but that these are not necessarily followed up on completion of projects. A further limitation relates to the way the EU supports civil society activities. EU funds are disbursed mainly via CfP, and there is not the opportunity to extend well-performing projects through new direct awards, although some CSOs obtain follow up financing in subsequent calls.

In the **Neighbourhood East**, CSOs expressed doubt as to the long term sustainability of outcomes of EU-supported actions and also questioned the long-term value of financed interventions, stating: 'at the end of the financing, most of the projects are closed, since the subjects and civil society, and the state do not have or do not plan to support them. In addition, projects with process indicators (outputs) rather than indicators of impact (impact) are accepted for financing. Thus, projects without change indicators are supported, and these projects do not plan to achieve sustainable changes in the environment and in target groups'. Another respondent commented that 'While participating in EU-funded projects, the potential is used, but the sustainability of the organisations is not ensured'.

EQ6 (Coordination, complementarity and coherence): *To what extent have the various forms of EU engagement (including policy dialogue and financial support) with civil society in the Enlargement, the Neighbourhood regions and Russia been effectively coordinated, complementary, and coherent with the activities of EU MS and other donors?*

Summary: The EU has invested significant efforts in promotion of coordination with MS and like-minded donors. These donors have participated actively in EUD-coordinated elaboration of European Joint Programming, Guidelines for Civil Society (Enlargement candidates and potential candidates) and Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (Neighbourhood countries). Coherence and complementarity have been improved overall; EU-MS cooperation in some Southern Neighbourhood countries is still affected by divergent political assessments and priorities of EU services and MS.

Finding 6.1 The EU's engagement with Civil Society in the Enlargement region has been effectively coordinated with the activities of EU Member States and like-minded donors

The EU invests significant efforts to hold coordination meetings with EU MS and like-minded donors. There are examples of joint policy stances in issues of matter to civil society (e.g. in Turkey) and also of coordinated efforts in responding to the needs of civil society more widely (e.g. supporting organisational development, watch dog and advocacy roles, etc.). Some EUD staff reported that donor coordination meetings are of uneven quality. Their mandate is sometimes too broad to allow for the necessary discussion of specific issues relating to civil society. There is some duplication, particularly in larger countries.

Difficulties in donor coordination were reported by EUD interviewees in countries with restrictive measures where donors need to act discreetly or confidentially, and where some support to CSOs is provided from outside the country.

Strategic and programming documents reviewed for this evaluation contained multiple references to lessons learned from previous interventions by the EU, MS and like-minded donors, as well as clear linkages with

ongoing or planned interventions by other donors. The templates used for applications in EU CfP require applicants to present, and the EU to assess, complementarity and synergy with initiatives of other donors. This issue is also covered in the template used for reporting on grant contracts.

In some countries there is EU and MS co-financing of relevant actions, although more common are efforts to improve complementarity of MS and EU civil society support. For example, France has relatively flexible small grant schemes for CSOs and actions which are too small to be directly considered by the EU.

The evaluators identified some overlap between calls for proposals and some duplication of efforts in actions supported by EU services, MS and like-minded donors. This is particularly marked with regard to the USA, which in some countries has significant civil society support initiatives, but without sustained engagement with the EU and MS in most cases. Not surprisingly, this leads to some duplication of initiatives and creation of parallel networks of CSOs.

For example, although there was some exchange of information between the IPA regional project 'Capacity Building of Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey' and the USAID funded project 'Stable development of NGO sector', there seem to be few synergies or regular coordination between the two donor initiatives.

In Morocco and Palestine, many respondents suggested that the CSO sector is characterised by divided EU-oriented and US-oriented CSOs. The basis of this division is perceived to be the funding relationship, rather than any thematic or methodological issue.

In the Neighbourhood South countries, the EU has gone further than the MS present in these countries in the mainstreaming of civil society support and the inclusion of CSOs into policy dialogue. In this context, the MS generally identify and focus on niche engagements that are coherent with and complementary to the EU engagement. Interviewees noted in these countries the persistence of distinctive interests and priorities of the MS, reflected also in their support to civil society and their participation in EU and MS coordination initiatives. Palestine benefits from well advanced joint programming between the EUD and the MSs, in which support to CSOs is clearly mainstreamed.

Finding 6.2 EU Guidelines for civil society (in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates) and Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (in the Neighbourhood countries) have improved coordination of EU and MS support to civil society

In the **Enlargement region**, the development of the EU Guidelines for Civil Society has been a great step forward in upgrading coordinated and coherent policy towards civil society in the region. This document established a clear programme of direction and support, which in turn created a momentum for civil society engagement across both the EU and the donor community, the government and civil society. Stakeholders interviewed mostly concurred that the adoption of this document marked a new phase of work and engagement with civil society across the region.

In the **Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood**, the introduction of the Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society ('roadmap') process has made a significant contribution to EU-MS coordination, providing structure, deadlines and ensuring buy-in from senior management. Interviews for this evaluation confirmed that roadmaps are prepared in close consultation with EU MS and in some countries with other like-minded donors.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, EUD and other interviewees commented that the EU and MS have distinctive political priorities, often reflecting historical and political relationships. In these contexts, the roadmap process has required a level of political debate, sometimes leading to inconclusive roadmaps, compared to countries where there is less divergence of priorities, and the roadmaps have a primarily technical character.

Most stakeholders interviewed in Palestine praised the coordination between the EU and the MS, noting that the second-generation roadmap was produced in a timely fashion and is well aligned with the European Joint Programming strategy.

Many interviewees suggested that there is little reporting or follow up on Guideline/Roadmap priorities. Where interviewees identified benefits to the roadmap process, these were associated with the discipline of preparation and the requirement for consultation, rather than in specific impact and follow up.

EQ 7 (EU-added value): *To what extent have the various forms of the EU's engagement with civil society in the Enlargement, the Neighbourhood regions and Russia over the evaluation period had characteristics which distinguished it from that of other actors?*

Summary: The EU has maintained a presence as a major donor to civil society in all countries covered by this evaluation, in a period when many MS, like minded donors, private foundations and international CSOs reduced their grant-making activity. MS have adjusted their own programming to reflect the EU role in supporting the enabling environment, capacity development and support for civil society engagement in dialogue with donors and national authorities.

Finding 7.1 The EU remains engaged as a donor in all the NEAR regions, in a context of donor consolidation and withdrawal

The EU has remained the largest donor to civil society in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and is the largest or second largest donor to civil society in all other countries covered by this evaluation. Although EU support to civil society has declined in most countries, it has declined less rapidly than the support of MS and like-minded donors, as well as private foundations and international CSOs. In the Western Balkans, and in those countries with the most restrictive environment for civil society (Belarus, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Egypt), many bilateral donors and most private foundations and CSOs have terminated their grant-making activities.

Finding 7.2 No other donor has invested in civil society in such a comprehensive manner, and the combination of targeted support and policy dialogue, represents a distinctive and successful feature of EU support

Due to its specific role and leverage, the EU has been able to provide support that has been different from support provided by other donors. The EU focus on the three priorities of the 2012 Communication represents a comprehensive commitment to civil society which is very widely recognised by other actors. This EU policy and intervention has high level approval from the MS. The EU support to the enabling environment and to capacity development in particular provides essential 'backbone' support that underpins and reinforces the more thematically focused interventions of other donors.

In the case of the withdrawal of funding for American cooperation from the Palestinian territories, in particular for Palestinian and Israeli human rights NGOs, the EU has become the main donor for the human rights sector both in Israel and Palestine.

The EU's contribution to democratic transition in Tunisia is widely recognised by all stakeholders interviewed. In Morocco, other actors such as AFD and USAID have been precursors with programmes like the PCPA, SANAD and the PGL, centred on democratisation and local governance objectives by supporting civil society before 2011. The EU has subsequently been able to redeploy its interventions on these themes. In Palestine, the recent withdrawal of USAID, but also of the FORD Foundation - a key player for the human rights movement - places the EU, and other MS, in a 'monopoly' position in the human rights field, which has long been the case in Israel.

In the **Enlargement** region, the evaluation found that other donors mostly engage with civil society organisations on an individual basis or through CfP, but without necessarily investing in systematic dialogue with governments and/or building capacities of government to strengthen their consultation mechanisms, as the EU has. Also, no other donor insists or envisages support to civil society through their sectoral interventions. When it comes to regional instruments, the review of available reports and evaluations indicates that no other donor invests so strongly in the region, and particularly not through a combination of thematic and regional instruments, which has been a distinctive feature of the EU's support in the Enlargement region. Funds from EU MS are minimal and usually only offered on project by project basis, in support of, or to complement EU support. USAID remains active in the region with large financial envelopes for civil society, though no regional instruments were evidenced. The EU's approach, therefore, has the distinctive feature of helping to build social cohesion and regional links across countries through joint thematic projects. Likewise, in the **Neighbourhood South**, this evaluation found no evidence that any other donor provides such a regional and thematic approach. In the **Neighbourhood East**, the regional ENI and its predecessors provide more than 90% of financial support and are responsible for more than 90% of relevant actions, while the thematic programmes EIDHR and CSO-LA represent less than 10% of relevant actions and less than 10% of funding, and have thus remained marginal within overall EU support to civil society in the six countries of the Neighbourhood East.

Leveraging EU accession perspectives with funds directed to civil society capacity and empowerment was another additional value in comparison to other donors in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates. Conversely, many interviewees in the Neighbourhood countries, particularly in the Southern Neighbourhood,

suggested that the EU faced difficulties leveraging partnership perspectives, because of the relatively limited incentives, and a visible political resistance to such incentives within the EU.

EQ 8 (EU-added value): *To what extent could changes, which the EU contributed to, have happened in its absence?*

Summary: In the Western Balkans, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, the changes to which the EU contributed could not have happened in its absence. In the Neighbourhood South, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the changes to which the EU contributed could have happened without EU support but would have taken longer and with less probability of success. The high volume of EU support would not be replicated by other donors even if the EU withdrew. In the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates, the EU successfully leverages political and operational dimensions for mutual reinforcement; MS and like-minded donors would not have the same influence. These dynamics are also present in the Neighbourhood countries, but the incentives that the EU has to offer are more modest and do not enjoy such widespread support as in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates.

Finding 8.1 In the Western Balkans, Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, the changes to which the EU contributed could not have happened in its absence

In the **Enlargement region**, the changes which the EU contributed to would have taken much longer in its absence, and could also have been derailed by conflict or lack of support from key stakeholders. The role of the EU as donor and political actor cannot be usefully separated for analytical purposes from the shared objective of EU membership and the framework and mechanisms established to reach this objective. This framework has been accepted by all key actors, and both MS and other development partners structure their own interventions with the intention of providing complementary support to this common objective. If EU support was reduced but the objective of EU membership maintained, the type of support provided by MS and other development partners would presumably adjust to meet priority needs of the presumably slower accession process.

The reduction in other donor funding to CSOs in recent years partly reflects the availability of significant volumes of EU funding but also the success of the EU accession process. Most of the Western Balkan accession candidates have made significant improvements on a range of development and transition themes. CSOs are transitioning out of multiple areas of service delivery which are now provided by the public sector.

A lower availability of EU funds for CSOs might lead to greater diversity of approaches with the return of American private foundations and an increase in support from MS to CSOs. This is unlikely to lead to divergence or incoherence because these actors would continue to identify with the policy objective of EU accession as well as the specific reforms required to achieve this.

In relation to Turkey, any reduction in EU political support to civil society could intensify the shrinking of the space for civil society engagement. MS and other development partners could be expected to increase their bilateral operational and political support somewhat, but it is hard to see how this could have a comparable or greater impact than the EU's own efforts. Most European stakeholders and local CSOs assess the authoritarian trends in Turkey as a result of domestic factors and not to any substantial perception of EU 'interference' – this suggests that a lower-key EU engagement would not significantly contribute to a reduction in tension.

MS and other development partners would be unlikely to provide comparable levels of support to CSOs working on service delivery and protection of rights of refugees, asylum seekers and other particularly vulnerable groups, should the EU reduce its engagement on these themes.

In Moldova and Ukraine, as well as Georgia, the perspective of EU membership or at least a significantly higher integration provides common objectives and an agreed framework for cooperation. Civil society engagement is recognised by all stakeholders as contributing to these shared goals. MS and other development partners design their own support as complementary to these shared goals.

Finding 8.2 In the Neighbourhood South, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the changes to which the EU contributed could have happened without EU support but would have taken longer and with less probability of success

Document review and stakeholder interviews reveal that societal changes would most probably happen but would take significantly more time than without the support of the EU (and the promise of EU integration).

In Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan, EU integration is not a hegemonic goal, and some key actors are opposed to the engagement of CSOs in pursuit of issues that are also EU objectives. In the absence of the leverage effect of shared integration goals, the EU has nevertheless (in Belarus and Azerbaijan) had some success in constructive engagement on non-controversial themes of common interest, involving both pro-regime and critical CSOs.

There is no consensus in most Neighbourhood South countries about what future relationship with the EU is most desirable, which is quite unlike the situation in the Western Balkans and some Neighbourhood East countries. For the Neighbourhood South countries, EU membership is not an option. There is much less expectation that dialogue, or concrete reforms must, or probably would, lead to a closer relationship. This diversity of views is strong within civil society, also reflecting political polarisation between leftist, liberal, conservative and Islamist currents. There are significant CSO currents that are critical of EU integration goals and strategies. In the absence of the leverage effect of shared integration goals, EU support to civil society is hardly different from that provided by MS and other development partners.

Palestine is an exception, in that the EU provides significant and sustained support to key civil society networks and facilitates a common political engagement of the EU and MS towards the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of the evaluation are organised in four clusters: EU commitment to civil society; improving outreach to civil society at the grassroots level; mainstreaming of civil society; and sustainability of CSOs.

6.1. Cluster 1: EU commitment to civil society

6.1.1. Conclusion 1: EU support to civil society is relevant and essential

The EU is the largest donor to civil society across the entire region covered by this evaluation. In the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates and in many of the other countries concerned, MS have adjusted their own support to seek complementarity with the EU's support. In the move towards joint programming, many MS have reduced their support to civil society, particularly on themes of enabling environment and capacity development, which are a key focus of EU engagement in all countries.

In this context, reduction in EU support would have brought negative effects, without any significant potential to create efficiencies or reduce overlap between development partners. Since this is an area of development cooperation where the EU and MS have developed well-defined complementarities and a generally accepted coordination framework, reduction of EU support would have also put pressure on MS development cooperation systems.

This conclusion is based on EQs 1, 2, 3 and 7.

The EU's overall strategy for civil society, in all regions, is to strengthen its ability to participate, independently, in democratic processes. The needs of civil society in this regard are inextricably linked to the political contexts and environments within which they operate, and the EU's strategy towards civil society in each of the regions covered by this evaluation clearly reflects this understanding. While the COM 2012 articulates priorities which are well understood inside the EU and among key stakeholders and beneficiaries, this evaluation has also found that the EU's strategic approach has been responsive to the context that characterises different regions, and has found examples which demonstrate the ability of the EU to respond flexibly to specific needs within those regions.

The EU has a clear policy commitment and comprehensive programming tools and approaches. The Guidelines (Neighbourhood) and Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (elsewhere) have found wide acceptance as a tool for joint analysis and elaboration of common priorities. Stakeholder perceptions are mostly positive or highly positive. In fact, critical comments on policy issues reported to the evaluators almost exclusively related to perceived inconsistencies, or issues where stakeholders considered that the EU should be more consistent and more determined in the pursuit of the three priorities of the COM (2012).

There is no significant stakeholder or group of stakeholders proposing a reduction in EU support or even a significantly different approach to funding. Rather, it is the flexible range of implementation modalities that have allowed the EU to adapt to the needs of civil society in different contexts. For example, the evaluation found a high level of appreciation amongst EUDs and CSOs in the delivery mechanisms that are being increasingly used to widen the coverage of civil society financial support, such as Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP). Where criticism was made, this tended to be on well-known limitations of the EU regulations and procurement procedures which make it difficult to award small or very small grants, to simplify the application and reporting requirements, or to waive or significantly simplify requirements to provide support documents to justify expenditures. To a large extent, these issues concern the delivery of EU financial support at a global level and are not specific to EU action in the countries covered by this evaluation.

Measures such as systematising the participation of civil society in programming and implementation of EU support across different sectors are also positive developments in order to strengthen participation and maintain relevance to civil society, although the evaluation has found that there is a mixed reception amongst civil society and EU staff on the effectiveness of consultation processes. Good examples

highlighted in this evaluation suggest that there is scope for practices to be improved, including through the sharing of best practice within and across regions.

6.1.2. Conclusion 2: There is significant stakeholder support for EU policy regarding civil society

The three priorities of the COM (2012) are well understood among key stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guidelines (Neighbourhood) and Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society (elsewhere) have found wide acceptance as a light tool for joint analysis and elaboration of common priorities. Stakeholder perceptions regarding EU policies are mostly positive or highly positive. There is no significant stakeholder or group of stakeholders proposing a reduction in EU support or even a significantly different approach to funding.

This conclusion is based on all EQs.

Stakeholder concerns on policy issues reported to the evaluators almost exclusively related to perceived inconsistencies, or issues where stakeholders considered that the EU should be more consistent and more determined in the pursuit of the three priorities of the COM (2012).

Stakeholder concerns on funding issues reported to the evaluators mostly related to well-known limitations of the EU regulations and procedures which make it difficult to award small or very small grants, to simplify the application and reporting requirements, or to waive or significantly simplify requirements to provide support documents to justify expenditures. To a large extent, these issues concern the EU at a global level, and are not specific to EU action in the countries covered by this evaluation.

6.1.3. Conclusion 3: Commitment and contracting of funds to support civil society does not fully reflect the strong EU policy statements in favour of civil society

Although the EU contracts more funds to support civil society than its indicative commitment targets (in the Neighbourhood countries), support to civil society is declining almost everywhere in relative terms and in most countries in absolute terms.

This conclusion is based mainly on the analysis of commitment and contracting of funds presented in chapter 4

At the level of Financing Decisions for the Neighbourhood, the EU commits less funds to support civil society than the indicative commitment target identified in the SSFs. At the level of contracting, in these regions and in the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates, CSOs are failing to maintain their share of the growing EU support to NEAR countries. In most countries, the absolute volume of funds contracted to CSOs is declining.

The shrinking share of targeted and mainstreamed support to civil society in EU global portfolio support may reflect the EU's increased use of trust funds and budget support, which are modalities in which CSOs are absent or marginal as implementation partners.

6.2. Cluster 2: Improving outreach to civil society at the grassroots level

6.2.1. Conclusion 4: Financial Support to Third Parties increases opportunities for smaller CSOs but has limiting factors, and may exclude medium sized CSOs

FTSP is regarded as an important modality for extending the EU's support to smaller, grassroots CSOs who lack the organisational capacity to independently apply for, and thus benefit from, EU support in response to regular Calls for Proposals.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 2 and 3.

This evaluation has found that EUDs are now actively employing the FTSP modality for civil society projects in all the regions covered by this evaluation. However, administrative and financial processes of this modality continue to be challenging for national, medium to large sized CSOs, thus favouring larger or international CSOs as lead implementing partners of grant contracts. Other limitations include the so-far limited ability of the EU to monitor the results achieved through this modality, although this is now being addressed by the EU through a technical assistance programme. An unintended consequence if use of FTSP continues to increase in the future is that it may push out national-level CSOs who are too large to benefit as sub-grantees, and yet too small to implement grant programmes as lead organisations.

The ability of local CSOs to obtain EU funds as lead applicants is directly related to the enabling environment (with Russia and Georgia as exceptions). It may also reflect different patterns of civil society development and relations between local and European civil society. There is a greater presence of international CSOs as lead applicants in the Southern Neighbourhood, which has been historically dominated by the European Union countries, than in the post-communist Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries.

As a result of the distance between the EUD and sub-grantees, the evaluation also found limitations in the extent to which the EU is able to effectively keep track of the number of beneficiaries and monitor the results of actions delivered through sub-granting, and a further criticism was that grant beneficiaries are unable to participate in the actual design of the actions supported through the grants.

6.2.2. Conclusion 5: Consultation on needs and priorities has become increasingly systematic but processes could be improved

This evaluation has found that, across all regions, the EU has become increasingly systematic in ensuring that the needs and priorities of civil society are integrated into programming of interventions and in policy dialogue. This requirement has been reinforced in key strategic documents and guidelines, such as the IPA II Guidelines.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 3 & 4

Across all regions, the evaluation found clear evidence that civil society is regularly and systematically consulted in the design and implementation of EU support. Engagement of civil society is promoted in both programming of spending activities, such as those financed through the IPA instrument as well as in non-spending activities, such as policy dialogue. This indicates that this type of 'mainstreaming' of civil society, in line with the EC's definition, is now taking place in all regions. As a result, this type of engagement has the potential to both improve the relevance and responsiveness of EU support to civil society's needs and can also help build the capacity of civil society as it actively participates in policy processes. Examples such as those in Jordan illustrate how effective this can be when consultations are well-prepared, structured and followed up.

Where participation is more restricted, such as in those countries where there are 'shrinking spaces', the EU has taken active measures to provide safe spaces for civil society to take part in policy events, either by engaging with civil society through other parties (such as EED) or by providing alternative locations to convene.

While consultation has, therefore, now become the 'norm', this evaluation found that there is still variation in the quality and, therefore, the effectiveness of the processes employed. Feedback from both EUDs and CSOs suggested that the availability of time and human resources are one of the factors that limit the extent to which consultations are fully prepared for, attended and followed-up. Other limitations include the lack of diversity amongst participants; inadequate representation of interests from grassroots/local CSOs; the processes themselves (which can sometimes be too formal); the presence of stakeholders who can negatively impact on the openness of civil society participants; and a lack of transparency/information on how the results of consultations are followed up and integrated into policy.

The evaluation recognises that there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to best practice on how to effectively consult with civil society. The nature of the consultation will be determined by many factors, such as the target group with whom the EU is trying to engage. This might be focussed around a particular interest area, such as youth, environment, business, thus requiring different practical considerations such as timing, location and consultation tools and techniques employed. The purpose of the consultation will also be critical; it may be intended to result in a contribution to a formal policy process, such as in the case of Jordan, or it may be seeking innovative ideas on programme design.

Good practice has been identified within this evaluation and, while circumstances vary widely within and between countries and regions, there is a wealth of experience and lessons that transcend borders.

6.3. Cluster 3: Mainstreaming of civil society

6.3.1. Conclusion 6: Mainstreaming of civil society is significant

This evaluation has examined the extent to which the EU has been effective across all forms of support, including that which is targeted towards civil society and that which seeks to provide mainstreamed support to civil society (both in policy dialogue, and in targeted support across different sectors). While approaches to increase the involvement of civil society in EU-supported interventions, and in policy dialogue are well understood and practised in all regions of this evaluation, there is not yet a comprehensive understanding of the concept of mainstreaming and what it means as a systematic process across all sectors.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 2 & 3, and on the analysis presented in Chapter 4

Targeted support alone would not enable the EU to meet the financial indicative targets for support to civil society presented in the SSFs for most Neighbourhood countries.

The countries in each sub-region with the highest level of EU support to civil society tend to have the highest levels of mainstreaming support.

At the same time, the failure of CSOs to maintain their share of EU funds in the context of constantly rising commitment of funds for cooperation with the NEAR regions may reflect weaknesses or limits of mainstreaming of civil society.

Engaging civil society through consultation processes is now happening across all regions of the evaluation, and this is most clearly visible in policy dialogue processes, which traditionally consult with different stakeholders in society. While this is not new, and while these types of practices have been common throughout the whole period of the evaluation, it is their 'systematic' nature that enables them to be considered as concrete examples of 'mainstreaming'. This is clearly reflected in the EU definition of mainstreaming, which is 'systematically involving and consulting civil society in all sectors of support interventions and policy dialogue'.

The definition is not, however, restricted to policy dialogue. Rather, it includes engaging civil society in the programming and design of targeted support, or in provision of services, across all sectors. This differs to targeted support for civil society, which is directed specifically towards civil society as a sector or primary beneficiary, e.g. capacity building programmes, whereas 'mainstreaming' of targeted support occurs when support is directed towards other sectors (e.g. environment, health, private sector development) and within which civil society can play a key role, either as implementing partner, beneficiary or stakeholder.

This latter category of mainstreaming has been documented and observed in all regions during this evaluation, even if these activities are not necessarily regarded as examples of mainstreaming by EUDs themselves. For example, civil society has been engaged in Sector Working Groups (Enlargement region), as participants during implementation of education projects (Neighbourhood East) and in defining allocations of funding for country strategies (Neighbourhood South).

6.3.2. Conclusion 7: EU M&E systems do not effectively capture and report on the quantity and quality of civil society support

The evaluation did not identify effective EU monitoring tools or report that tracked the divergence between indicative commitments to civil society in SSFs the lower volume of funds committed in Financing Decisions, and the resulting volumes and thematic distribution of targeted and mainstreamed support. In this context, it is not clear to the evaluators what the role of the indicative target in the SSFs might be.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 2 & 3, and on the analysis presented in Chapter 4

It is not clear to the evaluators or to EU staff interviewed for this evaluation to what extent the indicative commitment to civil society in the SSFs relates specifically to targeted support, and to what extent it might relate also to mainstreamed support. This reflects the non-binding nature of this indicative commitment, which is not tracked or reported against. Assuming that this indicative commitment relates only to targeted support, then there would be no quantitative target for mainstreaming. This would presumably weaken the implementation of policy declarations and training activities in support of mainstreaming.

The DAC sector code encoded in CRIS by EU staff is not a reliable indicator, because a significant proportion of actions implemented by CSOs are encoded with a DAC code for civil society and governance, irrespective of the main sector in which the action takes place. The EU has not yet established an adequate data management system that could support monitoring of FSTP or any other modality. Specifically, there is no possibility in CRIS to record that an action includes FSTP, the identity of sub-grantees, the purpose of sub-granting and the amounts sub-granted. There is still a shortage of sectoral, country or regional studies that provide significant findings about use of and results of FSTP. The evaluation did not identify any EU tools or reports that accurately track commitments to civil society, contracting of funds for targeted and/or mainstreamed support, or use of FSTP. Action level evaluation reports commissioned by project implementers are for the most part not available in CRIS and not easily accessible by EU staff not responsible for management of that specific contract.

6.3.3. Conclusion 8: The EU has had some success in supporting CSOs in countries where there is shrinking space for them to participate in democratic processes

Support to CSO engagement on non-controversial themes and mainstreaming of civil society in non-controversial sectors of EU cooperation can provide legitimacy and support to CSOs even when there is shrinking space for them to participate in democratic processes

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 1,3,4,5,8 and analysis of contracted funds presented in Chapter 4.

Throughout this evaluation, the political context in which civil society operates is repeatedly identified as the principal factor affecting the achievements that can be realised with EU support. In contexts where there is shrinking space for civil society, and in which governments have constrained the enabling environment, this evaluation finds that there is still potential for mainstreaming to build civil society capacity despite these factors. In such environments, although CSOs may be severely restricted from participating in processes related to public governance and democracy, they are regarded as more legitimate actors in other, non-politicised areas, such as in environment, or in disability and other social areas.

This is particularly the case when they are also providing a public service. By strengthening civil society's capacity to operate in these other sectors, the EU can provide an avenue through which civil society can continue to access support and become stronger participants in actions and in policy dialogue.

6.4. Cluster 4: Sustainability of CSOs

6.4.1. Conclusion 9: Sustainability of civil society interventions is not adequately addressed by grant beneficiaries or the EU

The evaluation did not identify significant improvements in sustainability of CSO grant beneficiaries during the period covered by this evaluation.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 3, 4 and 5.

Despite significant and sustained investment in civil society capacity development, the EU continues to deal with a largely donor-dependent sector of CSOs.

Availability of EU funds is less predictable than funds provided by some other grant makers. The competitive grant procedure does not currently allow the EU to offer second phase financing to successful grant beneficiaries. Themes and timing of CfP varies and selection and contracting of grants can take a long time. In this context, many CSOs demobilise professional staff, or shift from one theme to another depending on the focus of available funds.

The EU continues to provide significant capacity development support to improve applicants' ability to apply for one-off competitive grant funding. There is rather less investment in capacity development support that might assist CSOs in diversification of income, and development of local resource mobilisation. EU and CSO staff interviewed for this evaluation expressed frustration with the limited scale of such activities and limited results so far.

Although EU grant proposals and reporting templates require a narrative discussion of sustainability issues, no CSO representatives or EU staff interviewed for this evaluation considered that these arrangements make a significant meaningful contribution to encouraging sustainability. The EU financial support modalities do not offer significant incentives to CSOs that become more sustainable. Larger CSOs are often expected by EU staff to propose a higher percentage of co-financing, which could be considered a disincentive.

Most local CSOs interviewed for this evaluation did not expect to become eligible for longer-term or programme-based support in the foreseeable future.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Cluster 1: EU commitment to civil society

7.1.1. Recommendation 1: Verify that adequate monitoring of the translation of policy commitments into effective programming is in place

The EU should strengthen its monitoring of the translation of policy commitments towards civil society into effective programming. This particularly concerns the reflection of the earmarking of funds in SSFs (for the Neighbourhood countries) into the commitment of funds in FDs, the contracting of funds compared to this commitment, and the progress of mainstreaming of civil society in all the NEAR regions.

The EU should identify factors contributing to the low alignment between earmarking of funds and contracting of targeted and mainstreamed funds and adopt the necessary corrective measures. Alternatively, if the EU does not consider that its indicative commitments to civil society in the SSF have implications for programming, and do not represent targets against which progress should be tracked, the EU should consider reformulating or omitting such declarations in future SSFs to avoid confusion.

The EU should clarify whether its earmarking of funds for support to civil society in the SSFs applies to targeted support and/or mainstreamed support, and whether it includes the share of EIDHR and CSO-LA funds managed by NEAR.

The EU could consider earmarking for civil society a specific proportion of funds allocated to the Enlargement candidates and potential candidates in the multi-annual Country Strategy Papers.

In light of the failure of CSOs to maintain the proportion of EU funds they secure during the significant expansion of EU development cooperation with the NEAR countries during the period covered by this evaluation, the EU should internally clarify to what extent its declared commitment to civil society as a pillar of development and a strategic partner remains valid. To the extent that the declining share of EU development cooperation delivered via CSOs reflects a *de facto* downgrading of the priority attached to civil society, the EU should clearly communicate its revised priorities to the relevant stakeholders.

This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 3 and 7.

Main implementation responsibility: DG NEAR CoTE, NEAR management

Main associated actors: Heads of Cooperation in EUDs

What works and should continue?

EU policy statements, goals and commitments regarding support to CSOs, including funding commitments and 'earmarking' of funds for CSOs are clear and publicly available.

Since most actions which support CSOs are clearly identified, the allocation of EU funds to support these actions is very straightforward. Most relevant actions can be identified by their contract type (grant contract) and implementing organisation (any non-profit non-state actor). A minority of relevant actions can only be identified by a subjective assessment of their objectives. This can be done with a reasonable level of accuracy using simple keyword searches, and this can be improved by opening Annex A of the grant contract/the action document/the Terms of Reference, depending on the type of action. This is the approach taken in this evaluation for example.

What should be strengthened?	How should this be done?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DG NEAR should have, at EUD level and at HQ, a reasonably current assessment of actual spending on CSO support. • DG NEAR should monitor the implementation of policy commitments and fund allocations to CSO support, by collecting and reviewing data on actual spending on CSO support. • DG NEAR should reinforce its reporting on actual spending, and on the coherence between its allocation of funds and its actual contracting. • Where significant inconsistencies are identified, as for example in this evaluation, DG NEAR should promptly identify the causal factors and take corrective action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DG NEAR CoTE could verify the concerns identified in this report regarding the apparent significant difference between commitment of funds to support CSOs and funds actually allocated to this. Assuming that these concerns are confirmed, DG NEAR CoTE should propose next steps.

7.2. Cluster 2: Improving outreach to civil society at the grassroots level

7.2.1. Recommendation 2: Make greater use of the grant contract modality of FSTP to support mainstreaming of civil society

EUDs in NEAR countries should consider permitting FSTP in a greater proportion of Calls for Proposals beyond the governance-human rights-gender equality thematic cluster.

This would facilitate the engagement of a greater number and wider range of civil society actors. It could contribute to more grassroots and geographically diverse participation, as well as the engagement of specialised actors.

Since the slower acceptance of FSTP among staff responsible for CfP beyond the governance-human rights-gender equality thematic cluster may reflect a lower awareness of this modality among these staff, NEAR CoTE could consider one or several studies and publications to diffuse best practice and success stories, and address common concerns. This theme could also be reinforced in staff training events and briefings.

This proposal is of medium importance and urgency since it addresses the under-utilisation of an existing modality. The proposed training and research activities would require minimum additional effort by the EU at minimum additional cost and risk.

This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 4

Main implementation responsibility: Heads of Cooperation, EUDs in the NEAR countries

Main associated actors: Heads of Cooperation in DG DEVCO countries, DG NEAR CoTE, DG DEVCO A.5

What works and should continue?	
The modality of grant contract including FSTP, but not the main purpose of the action, is increasingly used in most CfPs and in the direct award of grant contracts, across the countries addressed in this evaluation (see discussion in Finding 2.2).	
What should be strengthened?	How should this be done?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU services should make greater use of the existing modality of grant contract including FSTP across all sectors (it is currently used more frequently in CfP focused on civil society capacity strengthening, human rights, governance themes and gender equality). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DG NEAR CoTE could facilitate a discussion among DG NEAR HQ and EUD staff regarding experience with FSTP beyond the governance-human rights-gender equality thematic cluster, and clarify the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and risks. Coordination between DG NEAR and DG DEVCO would strengthen this work. Since FSTP is applied globally and regulated in the PRAG, the same issues are likely to be of interest to DG DEVCO, and recommendations would likely affect their work to the same extent as DG NEAR. Coordination and information exchange is necessary to avoid duplication of effort and maximise coherency.

7.2.2. Recommendation 3: Make greater use of the grant contract modality of FSTP as the main purpose of the action

<p>DG NEAR should consider encouraging grant beneficiaries to use the modality of FSTP as the main purpose of the action.</p> <p>The EU should consider providing support to existing foundations and grant-making CSOs, using the modality of FSTP, as the main purpose of the action, in order to provide a large number of small grants using simplified and flexible procedures.</p> <p>In situations where the EU faces persistent difficulty reaching out to specific groups of civil society actors, the EU could also consider making FSTP as the main purpose of the action compulsory, to establish ad hoc grant-making funds (or to provide funds to an existing grant-making non-profit entity).</p> <p>Since some EU staff have reservations about this approach, and there are few studies or evaluations currently available, the EU may consider one or several studies, seminars and/or pilot actions to explore the use of this modality.</p> <p>This proposal is of medium importance and urgency since it addresses the under-utilisation of an existing modality. Its greater use on a pilot basis would require minimum additional effort by the EU at minimum additional cost and risk.</p>
This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 4
<p>Main implementation responsibility: DG NEAR CoTE</p> <p>Main associated actors: Heads of Cooperation in DG NEAR countries, Heads of Cooperation in DG DEVCO countries, DG DEVCO A.5</p>
What works and should continue?

The modality of grant contract including FSTP, but not the main purpose of the action, is increasingly used in most CfP and in the direct award of grant contracts, across the countries addressed in this evaluation. It was allowed in some or all lots of 22% of CfP launched in the NEAR countries in the period covered by this evaluation (see discussion in Finding 2.2).

What should be strengthened?	How should this be done?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU services should make use of the existing modality of grant contract including FSTP as the main purpose of the action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DG NEAR CoTE could facilitate a discussion among DG NEAR HQ and EUD staff regarding the potential use of this existing modality, and clarifying the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and risks associated with it. DG NEAR staff in Delegations could experiment with the use of this existing procedure on a pilot basis, supported by DG NEAR CoTE. Coordination between DG NEAR and DG DEVCO would strengthen this work. Since FSTP is applied globally and regulated in the PRAG, the same issues are likely to be of interest to DG DEVCO, and recommendations would likely affect their work to the same extent as DG NEAR. Coordination and information exchange is necessary to avoid duplication of effort and maximise coherency.

7.2.3. Recommendation 4: Improve data management and M&E related to co-applicants and beneficiaries of FSTP

The EU should consider developing the data management tools and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms necessary to capture the EU's goals of strengthening support to local CSOs, including grassroots organisations, those outside the major urban areas, as well as a wider range of civil society actors. Specifically, this would require the encoding in CRIS or its successor databases of key data of co-applicants, as well as beneficiaries of FSTP, as well as the volume of funds allocated to them. The uploading of action-level evaluation reports should be made compulsory (impossibility to close a contract without uploading any reports produced).

This importance of this recommendation reflects the impossibility of systematic tracking, monitoring, assessment and evaluation of CSO support with the current data management system. The EU does not currently collect the most basic data about a (probably) significant and (almost certainly) rapidly growing proportion of CSOs receiving EU funds. The current arrangements are particularly unsuited for the tracking, monitoring, assessment and evaluation of EU support to local, grassroots and non-capital city CSOs, since these are highly concentrated among co-applicants and FSTP beneficiaries.

The urgency of this recommendation reflects the current, long-awaited adoption by DG NEAR (and DG DEVCO, which should be equally concerned) of a new data management system. The earlier this recommendation is acted on by senior management, the more likely its incorporation into the specifications of the new data management system.

This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 7

Main implementation responsibility: DG NEAR, DG DEVCO

Main associated actors: EU Delegations

What works and should continue?	
<p>Key data on co-applicants in CfP is registered in PROSPECT.</p> <p>The evaluators understand that the new OPSYS will record some relevant action level data relating to co-applicants. In the interest of effective monitoring of FSTP, this should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements recorded by EU staff: name and PADOR number of co-applicants and associates. • Elements recorded by the grant beneficiary and validated by EU staff: amount of project budget received by each co-applicant, contribution of each co-applicant to co-financing. <p>In addition to allowing the view, modification and extraction of this data at contract level (which the evaluators understand to be the case), OPSYS should allow the extraction of this data for sets of contracts selected by the user (based on FD, or date, or country where the action takes place or other relevant criteria).</p> <p>The evaluators understand that the new OPSYS will record some relevant action level data relating to FSTP. In the interest of effective monitoring of FSTP, this should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements recorded by EU staff: existence of FSTP, whether or not FSTP is the main purpose of the action. • Elements recorded by the grant beneficiary and validated by EU staff: maximum grant size, average grant size and/or number of beneficiary third parties. <p>In addition to allowing the view and extraction of this data at contract level (which the evaluators understand to be the case), OPSYS should allow the extraction of this data for sets of contracts selected by the user (based on FD, or date, or country where the action takes place or other relevant criteria).</p> <p>Since FSTP is likely to be included in the activities and results indicators and targets of the action log frame, OPSYS should allow the extraction of log frame data for sets of contracts selected by the user (based on FD, or date, or country where the action takes place or other relevant criteria).</p> <p>Until the new OPSYS is implemented, monitoring is based on CRIS. This system does not contain action-level data relating to FSTP. The likelihood of FSTP in a grant contract can be deduced from a review of the Guidelines for Applicants or other document on the basis of which the action was selected. Where FSTP is compulsory in a CfP, the existence of FSTP for the resulting actions could be inferred. Annex A to Grant Contracts (the Full Application prepared by the applicant(s)) identifies the thematic scope and methodology of FSTP, and may indicate the volume of funds concerned. In any case, Annex B (the Budget of the Action) contains the grant beneficiary's definitive declaration on the volume of funds concerned.</p>	
What should be strengthened?	How should this be done?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key data on co-applicants in all actions should be easily available to EU staff responsible for civil society support. This would also ensure the availability of this staff to external experts, in justified circumstances and under control of EU staff. • Key data on FSTP should be included in action-level data entered in CRIS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent of the key data on FSTP to be included in data management tools is still to be defined. • The requirements for this (including modification of databases, as well as templates for grant applications, grant beneficiary reporting, and possibly other templates, as well as training materials and instructions to EU staff) are still to be defined. • A study to develop the above issues as a base for discussion by EU staff could be commissioned. • To identify and make recommendations regarding best practice in the identification of appropriate indicators and the assessment of

	proposals for grant contracts including FSTP. The evaluators understand that NEAR CoTE is organising a seminar/expert group meeting which could contribute to this work.
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7.3. Cluster 3: Mainstreaming of civil society

7.3.1. Recommendation 5: Promote the exchange of good practice in mainstreaming in order to adopt this strategy more consistently

The analysis of financial support to civil society (see Section 4) indicates that mainstreaming has become a significant way of providing support to CSOs, and this evaluation has also found a variety of examples of how mainstream occurs in practice – both in policy dialogue processes and also in delivery of financial support. As explained in Conclusion 6, the level of support to civil society could be increased and made even more significant if there was more understanding of how to put this strategy into practice. As yet, there is not yet a clear or common understanding of ‘mainstreaming’ across all EUDs in NEAR countries.

The EU strategy to mainstream civil society across all sectors should continue to be promoted so that it is adopted more consistently by EUDs, and if efforts to do so could also be monitored and evaluated in order to continuously strengthen this type of support (also see Recommendation 4).

In addition, as one of the ways of mainstreaming civil society in non-spending activities, further guidance should also be provided on how EUDs can most effectively engage with civil society in a range of policy areas.

This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 6

Main implementation responsibility: DG NEAR, CoTE

Main associated actors: DG DEVCO, EU Delegations

What works and should continue?

The CoTE has produced a clear communication on the definition of mainstreaming and how it can be implemented at the EUD level. This guidance material should continue to be promoted and supplemented with further communications to reinforce understanding and uptake by EUDs in a more conscious way.

In some EUDs, figures indicate a particularly high level of mainstreaming, and this was also reinforced in stakeholder interviews. These EUDs should be encouraged to continue in their efforts to ensure mainstreaming, and to share good practice and lessons they have learned with other EUDs.

What should be strengthened?

- Knowledge on what mainstreaming means in practice should be further reinforced by the EC HQ and exchanged between EUDs.
- Good practice examples that illustrate the variety of ways of mainstreaming civil society should be identified, and shared between EUDs in order to provide inspiration, and lesson learning.

How should this be done?

- Guidance materials from the EUD should be produced in order to reinforce and expand on previous communications issued, also considering other ways of communicating the guidance.
- EUDs should be invited to present good practice at relevant civil society networks and fora.
- Case studies should be produced and disseminated at events and through online media, either as written material or video.

