



THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Thematic paper

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FOREWORD

The role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Human Capital Development (HCD) and Lifelong learning (LLL) is becoming increasingly important as the world navigates the complexities of the 21st century. These organisations are at the forefront of bridging educational disparities, fostering inclusivity, and empowering individuals to acquire the skills necessary for a rapidly changing global landscape. In an era of technological advancements and socio-economic shifts reshaping work and learning, CSOs have emerged as pivotal agents of change, championing innovative approaches that ensure no one is left behind.

This thematic paper, "The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Human Capital Development and Lifelong Learning" explores how CSOs enhance and support the evolution of education, training practices, and lifelong learning strategies. Through non-formal and informal learning and support to employment, they strengthen human capital. By leveraging their unique position within communities, these organisations facilitate lifelong learning opportunities tailored to individuals' diverse needs, particularly those in marginalized and underserved populations. Through targeted interventions and grassroots initiatives, CSOs play a critical role in enhancing the capacity of individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the economy at large.

In recent years, the importance of CSOs and their role in HCD and LLL has been increasingly recognized by governments inside and outside the European Union and other relevant societal stakeholders. These organisations are service providers and advocate for policy change and inclusive governance. Their ability to engage directly with local communities positions them as essential partners in shaping HCD and LLL strategies that reflect the realities on the ground.

In preparing this thematic paper, the European Training Foundation (ETF) has drawn upon extensive research and case studies from partner countries, offering a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape and future opportunities for CSOs in lifelong learning and human capital development. It serves as both a reflection of the progress made and a call for continued partnership in HCD and LLL.

The paper highlights several key areas where CSOs make significant contributions:

1. **Promoting Inclusive Human Capital Development:** CSOs are instrumental in advocating for inclusive Human Capital Development and Lifelong Learning strategies that accommodate learners of all backgrounds, including those economically disadvantaged, people with disabilities, migrants, and other vulnerable groups. Their grassroots approach ensures that learning is accessible, equitable, and aligned with the needs of diverse communities.
2. **Fostering Innovation in Lifelong Learning:** By introducing innovative pedagogies and leveraging technology, CSOs enhance learning experiences and outcomes. They are often at the forefront of experimenting with new education models, such as digital literacy programs and vocational training initiatives that prepare individuals for the demands of the modern workforce.
3. **Building Partnerships for Human Capital Development:** CSOs collaborate with governments, educational institutions, and the private sector to create synergies that amplify the impact of lifelong learning programs. These partnerships are crucial in mobilizing resources, sharing best practices, and scaling successful initiatives.
4. **Empowering Communities Through Lifelong Learning:** CSOs empower communities by providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to participate actively in their development. They strengthen local governance structures through capacity-building initiatives and promote civic engagement, contributing to sustainable development.

Despite their significant contributions, CSOs face numerous challenges, including limited funding, regulatory hurdles, and the need for greater recognition in policy-making processes. This paper calls for a more structured and collaborative governance framework that acknowledges CSOs as equal partners in Human Capital Development and Lifelong Learning.

As we move towards a future where lifelong learning is indispensable, the insights presented in this paper underscore the need for continued investment in and support for CSOs. Their work is vital in ensuring that lifelong learning becomes a reality for all, fostering resilient, inclusive, and equipped societies to face the challenges of tomorrow.

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This thematic paper provides new knowledge that will benefit policymakers and practitioners in the HCD field.

We invite you to explore this paper's findings and engage with the innovative practices and strategic insights CSOs bring. By harnessing the collective efforts of CSOs, governments, and stakeholders, we can build a more inclusive and equitable world where lifelong learning empowers individuals to reach their full potential.

INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by rapid transformation on a global scale, people's human capital is fundamental to sustain prosperity and societal progress. In the European Training Foundation (ETF) work, human capital refers to the competencies, knowledge, and attitudes that support individual potential and employment; taken together, they constitute a person's skills¹. However, not everyone can acquire the skills to secure a place in the labour market. Moreover, the labour market's demand for skills changes so quickly that workers struggle to maintain a relevant skill set.

The 2021 ETF-UNESCO joint conference, *Building lifelong learning systems: skills for green and inclusive societies in the digital era*, noted that a cultural adjustment that places lifelong learning (LLL) at the heart of skills development is required to address structural changes.

Education and training systems are not prepared for the profound transformation of our societies or to bring learning closer to people and counteract growing inequalities. [...] They primarily value learning in formal settings, recognising large chunks of skills and knowledge bundled into end-of-school diplomas and degrees while providing limited (if any) recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal education and training system. They are highly fragmented across formal, non-formal and informal forms of learning, creating rigidities in the progression routes of learners².

Establishing a harmonious and enduring LLL ecosystem necessitates deviating from conventional paths and questioning established methodologies. During a time when education and training have become public and open as they have never been before, systems are confronted with the new challenge of facilitating young or adult learners' access to good quality learning at any time in their personal and working lives. The European Union and its partner countries in the neighbourhood and beyond face this reality.

We have to acknowledge the variety of actors that make this picture complete. Along with formal education providers, employment and career services, non-formal service providers also bring value to the LLL ecosystem. Civil society organisations³ (CSOs) are among them, contributing from their perspective of non-formal and informal education, a flexible offer of services, and adapting to beneficiaries' needs. Strengthening ties with CSOs specialising in lifelong learning can help governments rise to the challenge posed by today's human capital development (HCD)⁴.

The public system's governance and leadership are pivotal in implementing public policies effectively and using optimal resources to deliver services to citizens. The governance of public systems concerns as well horizontal and vertical coordination among public agencies, so they share the same goals, avoid silos, collaborate and co-ordinate their actions between them and the non-state actors. The European Commission (EC) affirms that civil society participation in public policy dialogue and related processes leads to inclusive and effective policies if conjugated with resource allocation and sound management. Civil society actors in skills development are the social partners, namely

¹ ETF Strategy 2027, available at: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/ETF%20Strategy%202027.pdf>

² See conference conclusions: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/building-lifelong-learning-systems-skills-green-and>.

³ Civil Society Organisations are defined as an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens. CSOs are non-State, non-profit making actors operating on an independent and accountable basis. They include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs. Among them are community-based organisations, NGOs, faith-based organisations, foundations, research institutions, gender and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organisations, co-operatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media. They are essential actors in building the foundations for broad-based democratic process, as well as for inclusive and sustainable growth.

⁴ CSOs definition used in this Thematic paper is based on the European Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in External Relations", (COM (2012) 492), Luxembourg, October 15, 2012.

employers and employees' representative associations, and more and more CSOs, especially from the perspective of lifelong learning.

In the last round of the ETF Torino Process, national reports offer largely concurrent descriptions of policy contexts marked by mounting pressure for change in HCD systems and adaptation in response to internal and external developments, some of which are within the remit of decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders in education and training and in any case affect the way stakeholders interact with each other. National reports suggest that education and training in all countries are under pressure to adapt to a context undergoing profound changes⁵.

No doubt, shifting to LLL will help this adaptation. Moving towards LLL implies changes in the definition of education and training systems and how they function. Non-formal and informal learning recognition is done through innovation provision suitable to learners in diverse environments, quality assurance, validation, accreditation of short-term courses, continuous professional development, and entitlement to financial support.

What does this mean for CSOs active in LLL and HCD? How can their mobilisation and participation in HCD be further developed in Partner Countries? This thematic paper analyses CSOs' role in the context of HCD in Partner Countries of the ETF and reviews some conditions for regular civil dialogue and collaborative governance of LLL and HCD, including strengthening capacities.

The thematic paper draws from ETF studies implemented in 2020-21 to learn more about how CSOs work in skills development and who they serve in six partner countries⁶. It will elaborate on the findings from the studies⁷ to highlight the essential role CSOs play in LLL and HCD, for they can reach out to, empower, represent and give voice to population groups that experience vulnerability. This is especially important when disturbances, such as a global pandemic or economic and political downturns, challenge existing equilibria. Indeed, skills development can empower citizens and help the transition during adverse times.

Contributing to trust in society and democratic participation is another sphere CSOs care for and is often part of their LLL engagement. Governments in partner countries recognise that CSOs have specialised expertise that can improve the quality and relevance of lifelong skills development, notably when skilling young people and vulnerable individuals. CSOs can act as a bridge between the state and citizens to foster trust. Some countries provide openings for CSOs to participate in policy processes, such as consultations on new LLL laws, and governance bodies, such as adult learning councils. However, whether these openings are paving the way towards legal frameworks and mechanisms for governments and CSOs collaborative governance in LLL and HCD remains a question.

⁵ Policies for system change and lifelong learning: Torino Process cross-country digest 2018-2021, ETF 2022,

⁶ Albania, Jordan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan in 2020-21. In 2023, the study was carried out also in Moldova.

⁷ [Area 5.1 - Civil society organizations | Open Space \(europa.eu\)](#)

CHAPTER 1 EVOLVING PARTNERSHIPS IN HCD AND LLL: THE ROLE OF CSOS IN CONTEXT

This chapter delves into the dynamic and evolving role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the domains of Human Capital Development (HCD) and Lifelong Learning (LLL). It explores how these organizations have gradually increased their contributions to shaping and implementing policies across the European Union (EU) and its neighbouring regions. By examining the historical evolution of CSO involvement, the chapter highlights their growing influence in policy dialogues, their capacity to address emerging challenges, and their contributions to social fairness and economic development. The focus is on how the EU has increasingly recognized and integrated CSOs into its policy frameworks, mainly through external action programs to foster human capital and promote equitable learning opportunities.

1.1 The recognition of CSOs' diversity and role

The European Union recognises CSOs as highly heterogeneous entities comprising various actors with multiple roles and mandates. CSOs aim to ensure individual voices are heard. Notwithstanding the difficulties of involving them as an equal partner in policy dialogue, their role as a bridge between the public sector and local communities is critical. In the EU and partnership and development co-operation frameworks, civil society can reach, empower, represent, and defend local populations, especially the vulnerable and marginalised. The mediation role, in the words of the European Civic Forum (2021), "captures the basic function of CSOs, which is to embody, organise and channel the common aspirations and interests of society, or certain groups within society, including the underrepresented whose access to decision-makers is limited⁸."

How CSOs are organised in terms of specialisation and function varies. CSOs may extend their action to broad sectors or focus on specific issues; some span a wide geographical area, while others refer to the local or community dimension. Whether large or small, it is frequent that CSOs aggregate under umbrella organisations or federations. Legal frameworks also vary from country to country, setting the enabling conditions to represent specific societal needs. Legislations often adopt taxonomies with not-for-profit CSOs and those CSOs that are partially exposed to the market logic, such as cooperatives and social enterprises. In most cases, CSOs elect their constituent bodies regularly, democratically and transparently, and members participate directly in decision-making.

CSOs facilitate active and responsible citizenship by empowering individuals to shape projects and participate in advocacy. The impact is more significant when CSOs manage to represent the needs of citizens in new social laws and policies that impact the access to and quality of public services. In the skills development field, CSO participation in devising policies and programmes is essential during periods characterised by rapid change that requires upskilling, reskilling and mobility in the labour market. The engagement of CSOs also requires the political will of public authorities and mechanisms to coordinate actions and responsibilities. Governments can benefit from the constructive participation of CSOs in the policy cycle, from strategy formulation to policy design, implementation with monitoring, and the review of the implemented policy, including lessons learned.

The EU encourages actions in this direction. The European Pillar of Social Rights⁹ and its Action Plan¹⁰ set targets whereby, in the EU, by 2030, at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be

⁸ European Civic Forum, 2021, Towards an open, transparent, and structured EU civil dialogue Civil society's views on challenges and opportunities for an effective implementation of Article 11 TEU, Study by Linda Ravo, with input from the European Civic Forum group of National Platforms of NGOs and Civil Society Europe working group on civic Space; <https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Civil-Dialogue-Study.pdf>

⁹ [European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰ [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan \(europa.eu\)](#)

employed, and at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million. Several instruments have been devised to attain the targets. Regarding LLL and HCD, the European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience¹¹ envisages that both social partners and CSOs actively contribute to opening upskilling and reskilling opportunities for employed and unemployed people, thus turning LLL into a new normal for EU citizens of any age.

The European Skills Agenda is part of a broad recovery package¹² to foster sustainability, resilience and fairness in Europe for the next generation and to address persistent challenges such as globalisation's adverse effects, climate change, digital revolution, pressure on resources, ageing populations, as well as youth unemployment given its slower than expected decrease in some countries. In the current context of poly-crisis and accelerated changes, a paradigm shift in skills is needed more than ever: learning throughout life, including at an older age, will make a difference for individuals and society.

Since the 1970s, the EU has progressively engaged with CSOs through consultative processes when designing policies and guidelines and enacted schemes to support their participation in EU programming¹³. However, in 2007, dialogue with civil society became a principle with the Lisbon Treaty¹⁴, and progress has been made since then in recognition that CSOs reach out to, empower, represent, and defend socially excluded groups¹⁵, generating, at the same time, social innovation¹⁶. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturns and geopolitical crises, CSOs have shown responsiveness by implementing various mitigation measures. Through crises, they are learning new business models, increasing synergies by networking and campaigning jointly, recognising the value of multi-disciplinary teams to offer a broad spectrum of services to beneficiaries and diversifying funding sources.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has gathered evidence proving that CSOs are agile¹⁷ in addressing special needs beyond the system's reach because they are close to beneficiaries. They develop expertise on specific issues while handling formalities and bureaucracy more smoothly than public administrations. CSOs are seen as development actors and, according to the EESC, have the potential to become indispensable service providers, and their relationship with the authorities has strengthened¹⁸. The EESC stresses how important it is for national institutions to "understand that CSOs are *sine qua non* for democracy¹⁹". Partnering with CSOs will improve the development, implementation, and monitoring of European, regional, and national strategies at all levels and policy areas, with no exception for LLL policies.

CSOs also consider themselves "critical friends and partners²⁰" that can help governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders deliver their pledge to achieve a broad and transformative education in line with the European Skills Agenda and the SDG4 under the UN Agenda 2030. However, CSOs have limitations, including their size and resources, and they cannot replace a

¹¹ [Commission presents European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹² [NextGenerationEU - European Union \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹⁴ Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty: "the institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society."

¹⁵ EESC, Study "The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030", 2017, p. 5,

https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

¹⁶ "Social innovations are new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively. The European Commission's objective is to encourage market uptake of innovative solutions and stimulate employment" as defined by the European Commission (https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/innovation/social_en). These social innovations can therefore emerge based on listening to the voices of local communities, and public and private actors.

¹⁷ EESC, Study "The response of civil society organisations to face the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictive measures adopted in Europe", 2021, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-02-21-011-en-n.pdf>

¹⁸ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

²⁰ [The role of Civil Society Organisations in 2050 and beyond \(soroptimistinternational.org\)](#)

full-scale public service. At the system level, legislation is a necessary condition to unleash CSOs' potential while at the same time setting the quality pre-requisites. It should be noted that CSOs increasingly contribute to the social economy, but no legislative steps have been taken to unlock their operations at the EU level²¹.

To be sustainable and fully implement the principle of the Lisbon Treaty, civic dialogue processes need appropriate financial and human resources. In the context of EU funding mechanisms, the CSOs' financing sources have been diversified to reinforce the independence of CSOs and reduce their vulnerability "when faced with governments' negative attitude towards civil society"²². Diverse funding sources are essential in maintaining CSOs' independence, even more so if funding organisations have conflicting priorities, which may endanger a CSO's autonomy. In addition, establishing co-ordinating bodies²³ that are institutionalised to at least some degree helps ensure continuity of dialogue throughout the different phases of the policy cycle (agenda setting, policy definition, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and re-formulation).

1.2 CSOs as partners in LLL and HCD to the European Union and its neighbourhood

South-East Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with which the EU has nurtured long-lasting partnerships, are experiencing rapid technological transformation, exposure to new trade paradigms (and the risks and opportunities this represents), the effect of emerging commitments to low-carbon production, and changing consumption patterns. These relatively new changes add to conventional or 'legacy developments' that can be traced back to factors that have become a regular fixture. For example, in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED), such factors include large youth populations but limited employment opportunities due to economic volatility and associated labour migration. Across countries, there is the perception that transformations related to digitisation in the production processes and services, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the global migration flows are creating the demand for new, largely unanticipated skills²⁴. This understanding is reflected in partnership and investment plans, such as the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans²⁵.

To tackle the global and country-specific challenges, the EU proposes a strategic approach to engagement with local CSOs that covers all regions, including developing, neighbourhood, and enlargement countries. Due consideration is given to country-specificities, particularly in highly volatile political contexts. To support this process, back in 2012, the EU put forward the following three priorities²⁶:

- enhance efforts to promote a conducive environment for CSOs in partner countries;
- encourage meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in partner countries' domestic policies, the EU programming cycle, and international processes, and
- increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors more effectively.

In 2017, the Council of the EU again strengthened the EU's support for civil society by involving them as an actor in partnerships with external instruments and programmes in all areas of cooperation,

²¹ European Parliament, 2021/2103(INI), DRAFT REPORT on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe (2021/2103(INI)) by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 18.10.2021

²² EESC (2017), Study "The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030", https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

²³ [Towards an open, transparent, and structured EU civil dialogue \(civic-forum.eu\)](https://www.eu-civil-dialogue.eu/)

²⁴ Policies for system change and lifelong learning: Torino Process cross-country digest 2018-2021, ETF 2022,

²⁵ [New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economic-affairs/press-room/2021/08/2021-08-11-new-growth-plan-western-balkans)

²⁶ European Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in External Relations", (COM (2012) 492), Luxembourg, October 15, 2012.

including the EU Development Policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the EU Enlargement Policy. The Council Conclusions²⁷ stressed the importance of CSOs' meaningful and structured participation in policy dialogue, budgets, and aid priorities at the country level. The EU's engagement with civil society in external relations is key to implementing the EU Global Strategy and achieving the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG 17²⁸ and the European Consensus on Development²⁹ underscore the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships, and CSOs are recognised as essential actors in attaining all SDGs.

In 2021, the European Commission adopted the Global Europe Civil Society Organisations programme, worth €1.5 billion for 2021–2027³⁰. Funding is targeted specifically to support CSOs outside the EU for an “inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries, an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society, as well as a better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (global inequalities and ecological crises)³¹”. The programme foresees activities promoting the role of CSOs as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right and their engagement to contribute to inclusive and participatory democratic processes and better development outcomes.

In this context of positive openings to CSOs' participation in the EU policy-making and programming, the EESC observes the emergence of new government-supported CSOs³² that complement the activities of traditional CSOs critical to authorities. These government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) receive most of their funding from state grants and can safeguard organisational sustainability. However, according to the European Parliament, it is crucial “to ensure that mechanisms and strategies are devised to ensure that EU funds are not awarded³³ to GONGOs or organisations that do not respect EU values”.

At the end of this chapter, it is helpful to go back to the EU approaches, first with a note on the allocation for the citizens' engagement, and second, a call to vigilance that, by extension, is relevant to partner countries, too. From the EU budget 2021-2027, more than €13.4 million was allocated in 2021³⁴ for the citizens' engagement and participation strand (it is a successor to the Europe for Citizens programme), and most of this funding was made available through calls for proposals. This allocation is on top of previously mentioned budgetary commitments, which exceed the sums available under the previous EU budget in 2014-2020.

Working with CSOs is vital because their approaches facilitate reaching people and places experiencing adversity and allow them to improve their skills. To this end, several frameworks and guidelines support CSOs in HCD through LLL, both as service providers and advocacy groups:

- On a global scale, the SDGs have set targets and indicators for quality education through SDG 4 and partnerships for the goals through SDG 17;
- on the European level, several regulatory frameworks and guidelines exist: the European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience, the EU VET Recommendation, the Osnabrück Declaration, the Youth Employment Support: a bridge to jobs for

²⁷ EU engagement with civil society in external relations - Council conclusions (19 June 2017), 9049/17

²⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17>

²⁹ [European Consensus on Development \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_6792)

³⁰ European Commission, 2021, Global Europe: EU launches a global €1.5 billion programme to support CSOs, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_6792

³¹ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/mip-2021-c2021-9158-civil-society-organisations-annex_en.pdf

³² https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

³³ European Parliament, 2021/2103(INI), DRAFT REPORT on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe (2021/2103(INI)) by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 18.10.2021

³⁴ European Commission, 2022, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme - Performance report: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-overview/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme-performance_en

the next generation, Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe)³⁵; and

- dialogue with civil society as a fundamental principle was also explicitly acknowledged in the 2007 Lisbon-Treaty.

³⁵ The European Commission has reserved €1.36 billion in the Neighborhood, Development and International Co-operation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe. More information is available at [Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/en/global-europe-ndici)

CHAPTER 2 THE IMPACT OF CSOs IN HCD AND LLL IN PARTNER COUNTRIES: DOCUMENTED FINDINGS

This chapter delves into the results of the ETF study, which assesses the role of CSOs in HCD across six partner countries. It details the methodological framework used to analyse CSO contributions to lifelong learning (LLL) and employment support. The study employed a comprehensive survey, exploring various aspects such as beneficiaries, activities, funding, and involvement in policy dialogue. The following sections will unpack how CSOs address specific needs, drive innovative practices, and participate in policy discussions. Additionally, the analysis will address the challenges CSOs face in enhancing their policy impact, particularly concerning the local culture of civic engagement.

2.1 Rationale of the ETF study on the role of CSOs in HCD

Among the EU-agencies, the ETF works in the context of the EU external relations. ETF contributes to building a stronger Europe and achieving social fairness and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood (enlargement countries, Neighbourhood East and South) and other partner countries³⁶. The ETF's primary objective is to improve HCD in partner countries by providing monitoring, policy advice, sectoral analysis and support in broader education, training and LLL. To this end, the ETF works closely with the EC and EU Delegations in the partner countries, it cooperates with EU member states and international and regional donors, and it fosters dialogue with country stakeholders of the HCD sector, that is, governments, private sector actors, social partners, CSOs, providers, and research bodies.

Its intervention logic for the period 2025-2027 features three strategic objectives with a focus on skills, education and training system development from an LLL perspective, namely:

- (1) Skills relevance and anticipation - to identify changing skills demands and ensure skills relevance;
- (2) Skills development and validation - to innovate skills development models and processes;
- (3) Performance and quality of education and training policies.

The advice to partner countries' education and training policymakers on improving the performance and quality of skills, education and training policies aims at making LLL a reality for all. The advice entails analyses of good practices and quantitative evidence, peer learning and benchmarking, networking and participation in policy discussions³⁷. It also entails presenting governance approaches that build on partnerships among governmental actors, the private sector, social partners and other civil society actors in HCD and LLL because policies are more effective when designed and implemented inclusively.

Considering that formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings at the workplace and outside contribute to the HCD, both literature and data show that access to LLL and good-quality employment opportunities are essential for human capital development. In this context, CSOs are important actors in HCD policies, given their predisposition to facilitate LLL and transition to employment for all, especially those who tend to benefit the least from formal provision. Maintaining close contact with vulnerable groups and the population is essential. CSOs usually deeply understand societal challenges and how public policies (or lack thereof) affect them³⁸. Making LLL an integral part of social

³⁶ ETF Single Programming Document 2022-2024, p.10:

<https://sharing.etf.europa.eu/sites/dms/regs/Decisions/Single%20Programming%20Document%202022-24%20-%20Work%20Programme%202022/ETF%20SPD%202022-24%20WP2022.pdf>

³⁷ Evaluation of the ETF networks, by ETF-PPMI, 2020, p.21, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-04/evaluation_of_the_etf_networks_-_final_report.pdf

³⁸ Summary-Activizanship-5-1.pdf (civic-forum.eu)

and economic development must be based on sustainable partnerships among state and other actors, such as CSOs, to co-create solutions that each side cannot attain alone³⁹.

2.2. Methodology of the ETF study on the CSOs' contribution to HCD in ETF partner countries

Against the policy and conceptual background illustrated above, the ETF addressed a twofold research question: 1) do CSOs play a role in HCD in partner countries, and how? 2) are the CSOs active in HCD resilience when a shock occurs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic? A study was designed and carried out in six countries—Albania, Serbia, Jordan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan—from 2020 to 2021 to answer these questions⁴⁰.

The primary tool was a survey comprising 35 questions divided into four parts:

- Beneficiaries, activities, content, and learning environment;
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: changes in the organisation's beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Stakeholder and policy dialogue: participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts and the organisation's contribution to HCD policy; and
- potential in the HCD sector: current advantages and possible future contributions to the HCD sector.

The ETF designed a methodology that was homogeneous across countries for comparability purposes. In each country, the study followed six main steps:

- Mapping of CSOs that are active in the field of HCD, specifically in non-formal and informal learning and support to employment activities. They represent a sub-group of all CSOs registered in each country and were contacted with the proposal to take part in the ETF survey;
- Interview with a high-level representative of the CSOs that accepted to take part, one interview per CSO;
- Semi-structured interviews with people who had benefited from the CSO activities;
- Analysis of responses and data tabulation;
- Dissemination workshop to discuss the findings and conclusions with country stakeholders representing both the government and the CSOs;
- The finalisation of the country report is based on the data, research findings, and conclusions, considering the workshop results.

Table 1 – Number of identified CSOs in the HCD field and CSOs that took part in the survey by country

Country	Number of identified CSOs that are active in HCD	Number of CSOs that accepted to take part in the study
Albania	41	28
Jordan	37	15

³⁹ ETF-UNESCO International Conference Conclusions 21-25/06/2021, p.9, <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/building-lifelong-learning-systems-skills-green-and>

⁴⁰ The choice of countries was based on internal consultations in ETF.

Country	Number of identified CSOs that are active in HCD	Number of CSOs that accepted to take part in the study
Serbia	31	15
Tajikistan	27	16
Ukraine	71	41
Uzbekistan	29	25

Following the mapping of CSOs through the survey, the study documented the activities and their beneficiaries of the CSOs in the field of non-formal and informal learning and support to employment. It further explored how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to which extent the CSOs maintained their operational capacity, their resilience in terms of proactivity vs reactivity, and their ability to mobilise human and financial resources, as well as innovate and implement changes. CSOs were also asked to self-assess their organisational learning capacity, complementarity regarding the actions of local and national governments, engagement in policy dialogue with institutional stakeholders, and plans for the future.

2.3 Key findings from the ETF study in partner countries in a snapshot

The ETF study gathered evidence about the role of CSOs in skills development through non-formal and informal learning involving young and adult people, in services that link learning and employment, in awareness raising and advocacy regarding skills development, and employment and knowledge creation.

The study highlighted that the work done by CSOs adds value to the education and training ecosystem and the HCD policy cycle. CSOs can detect special needs in a granular manner and respond to those needs, get close to underrepresented population groups, and initiate innovative practices, all of which enhance the quality of the dialogue in education and training⁴¹.

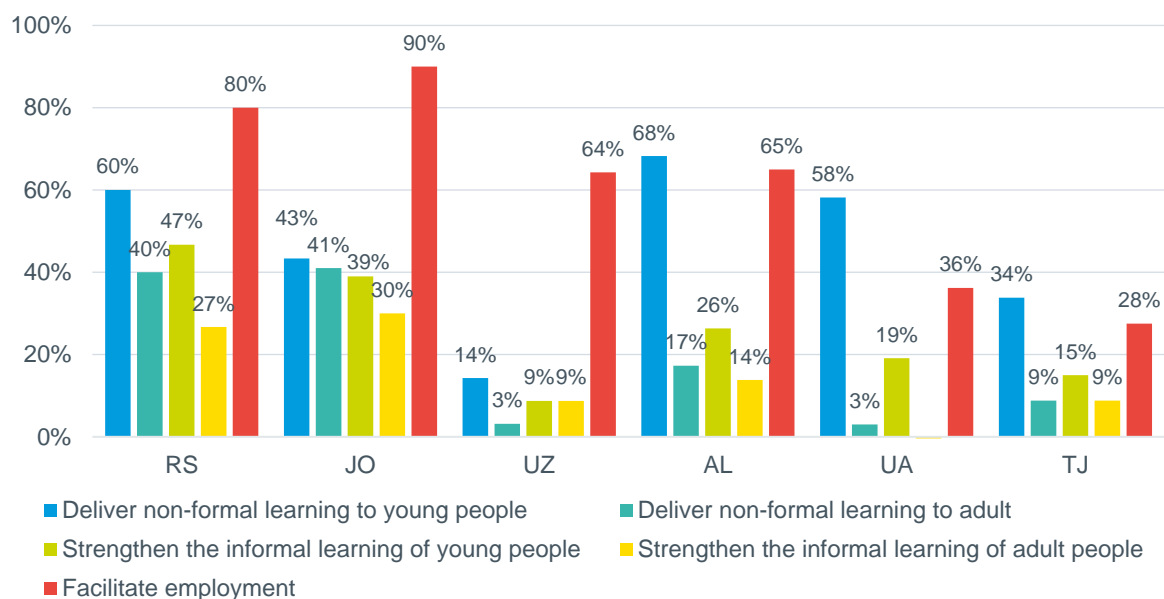
Based on discussions with the national and international representatives of government, non-governmental organisations, social partners and CSOs in the six partner countries, CSOs act as mediators between public authorities and citizens. Regarding policy dialogue in these countries, however, CSOs' participation is modest and largely depends on the pre-existing social and civic dialogue culture.

2.4 What do CSOs in partner countries do in LLL and HCD?

The findings presented and analysed here focus on what CSOs do concerning education, training, and support for employment, notably in non-formal and informal settings. The graph below illustrates the range of services CSOs that participated in the study provided concerning LLL and HCD. The graph also shows that the services that prevail are facilitating employment and delivering non-formal learning to young people.

⁴¹ Some of these findings emerged also from a previous study on CSOs, see: ETF, Policy Dialogue in Vocational Education: What Role for Civil Society Organisations? A pilot survey in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, 2019, p. 24

A1 Your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:

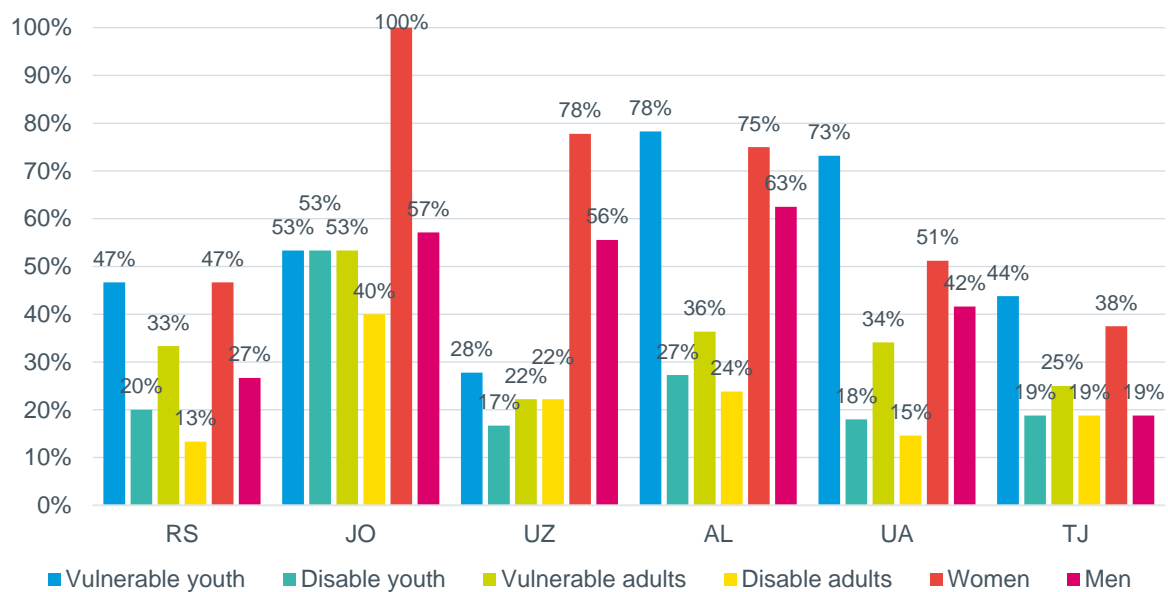


The CSOs were asked to specify which SDGs of Agenda 2030 they support. Only some CSOs recognised their support of SDG4. This shows, on one hand, that CSOs might underestimate their contribution to SDG4; on the other hand, core objectives that CSOs set for themselves include people having a resourceful life and inequalities are reduced. From that perspective, non-formal and informal learning represent means towards these objectives rather than end goals. This type of logic descends from the theory of change or similar approaches to planning.

The survey also concentrated on the beneficiaries of different CSOs and their activities. Vulnerable youth and women are the two groups at the centre of this question. As graph A2 below shows, these two groups are the primary beneficiaries of the services provided by CSOs in the six countries. For the CSOs in the study, it is a major advantage to detect the needs of groups who have been out of formal learning and employment systems, like vulnerable youth and women. In addition to addressing the needs through dedicated activities, the CSOs also aim to bring the voices of vulnerable populations to the policy dialogue.

Young people are mainly present in CSOs activities in almost all countries, but those most vulnerable receive specific attention. Albania and Ukraine exhibit high levels of CSO involvement in the area of vulnerable youth (above 70% of the CSOs surveyed), and such participation is significant in other countries, too, except for Uzbekistan. A specific feature in Ukraine is that CSOs' activities involve the adult population slightly more than the youth, while every Jordanian CSO says women are their primary beneficiaries. The Uzbek and Albanian organisations also reported strong engagement with women: 78% and 75%, respectively.

A2. The BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



This finding seems to underscore the study's hypothesis: CSOs in the surveyed countries can reach population groups whose attendance in formal education and training tends to be low. One of the added values of CSOs working in LLL is their capacity to increase everyone's access to learning opportunities, regardless of their status or life circumstances.

Two survey questions were designed to examine the scope of CSO work in HCD, focusing on the type (Box 1) and content (Box 2) of their activities involving young people and other beneficiary groups. Respondents could choose from multiple answers to illustrate the typology of their main activities that enable non-formal and informal learning and support to employment.

Box 1: Choices given to survey respondents regarding the type of their CSOs' activities

- Delivering non-formal learning to young people (e.g., training courses with no formal certificate);
- Delivering non-formal learning to adult people (e.g., training courses with no formal certificate);
- Strengthening the informal learning of young people (e.g., learning from peers, self-learning, learning from own experience, etc.);
- Strengthening the informal learning of adult people (e.g., learning from peers, self-learning, learning from experience, etc.);
- Facilitating employment (e.g., offer career guidance, support the transition from school to work, support people to maintain their jobs, etc.);
- Creating and/or using intelligent information on skills development and/or on employment (e.g., qualitative or quantitative data collection, independent data analysis, analysis of data from different sources, formulation of policy advice, etc.);
- Enhancing self-employment (e.g., support existing small businesses, support start-ups, etc.);
- Advocacy for young people (e.g., provide them a voice to express their views on education and training, their concerns on employment, etc.);
- Advocacy for adult people (e.g., provide them with a voice to express their views on education and training, their concerns on employment, etc.);
- Advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors (e.g., provide them with a voice to express social needs related to training, employment, other social policies, etc.);
- Other activities for skills development through non-formal and informal learning and services to employment not listed above.

By looking into the activities in which the interviewed CSOs are involved, it is relatively common to find that they deliver non-formal learning and employment support. The joint provision of these two services helps mutual reinforcement, which may improve the effectiveness of the activity and generate more significant benefits for the beneficiary of the said activity. This is the case in Uzbekistan, where learning and support for self-employment are frequently combined. However, different patterns have been found across countries. In Jordan and Ukraine, the combination of learning and employment-related activities is less frequent, and CSOs in these countries privilege learning-oriented activities over employment-oriented activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs faced significant challenges in providing education and training opportunities to young and vulnerable people. Despite the difficulties, CSOs' proved to be agile in responding quickly and flexibly to emerging challenges and niche areas of relevant policies. CSOs are mainly funded by donors present in the country (according to 70% of survey respondents), then by private donations or governmental funds, and finally, through self-financing mechanisms. Often, CSOs have adapted to the crisis by using different fundraising approaches, new management models, more teamwork and networking.

At this stage of the analysis, the main findings can be summarized as follows:

- The interviewed CSOs regularly provide learning in non-formal and informal settings, in most cases to young people who experience vulnerability and to women. These population groups also have lower access to formal education or are early leavers. Employment support is also a relevant area of CSO interventions for vulnerable people. When a temporary work placement or regular employment is of good quality, the chances that the learning is acknowledged, used and further developed are higher.
- Most CSOs frame their work within the scope of the UN Agenda 2030's SDGs, particularly the goals related to jobs and growth, gender equality, and inequality reduction. Quality education for all and partnerships for development are also priorities but in a less explicit way.
- Most CSOs (except those in Ukraine) focus on youth, and many are inclined to orient their services towards vulnerable youth and women.

2.5 CSOs are bridging skills gaps through HCD and LLL in partner countries

If the gap between the labour market's demand for specific skills and the actual skills supply is to be filled and skills predicted, new approaches involving human capital development and lifelong learning are necessary. The ETF study shows that CSOs specialising in HCD and LLL provide a valuable service to the people they serve and the governments in the countries where they operate. The ETF surveys' findings show what CSOs in six partner countries do and where they focus on education, training and support for employment, notably in non-formal and informal settings. The following sections will explore how these CSOs help bridge the skills gap.

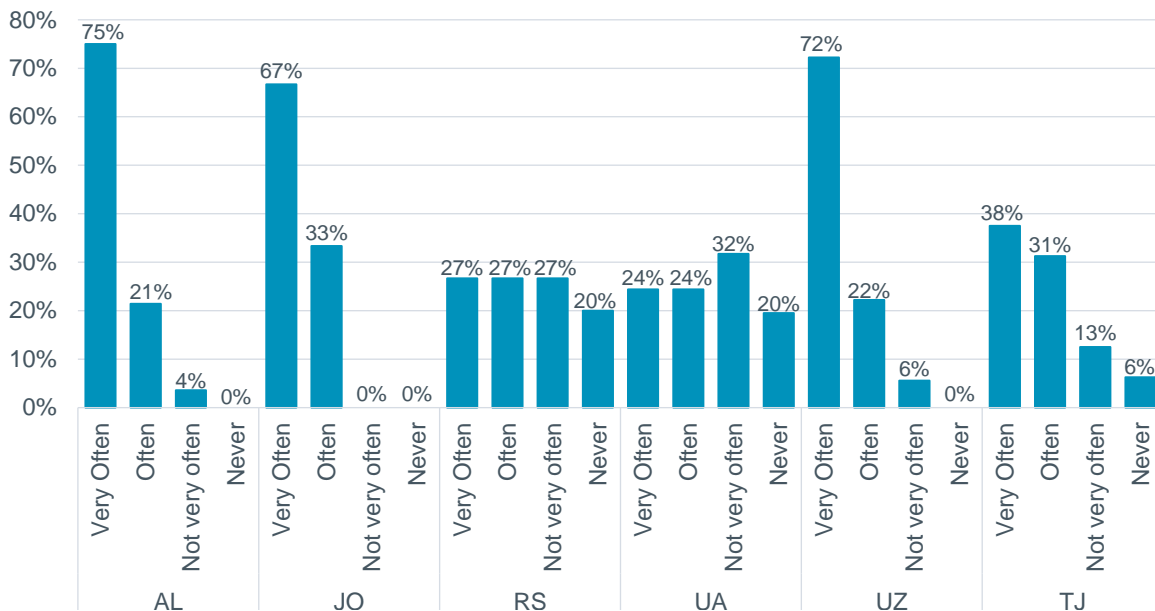
2.6 CSOs' understanding of skills gaps documented

To understand the priorities of the CSOs participating in the ETF study, they were asked to share information on their activities' specific content, purpose, and outcome; they are listed in Box 2. Variations among countries can be observed in **technical competences** (see Figure A3). CSOs from Albania, Uzbekistan and Jordan reported delivering technical competences very often (75%, 72% and 67%, respectively), while around one in every four organisations in Serbia and Ukraine reported the same. The focus on technical competences indicates that delivering skills for employment to the beneficiaries is a priority for surveyed CSOs.

Box 2: Choices are given to survey respondents regarding the content of the activities they offer

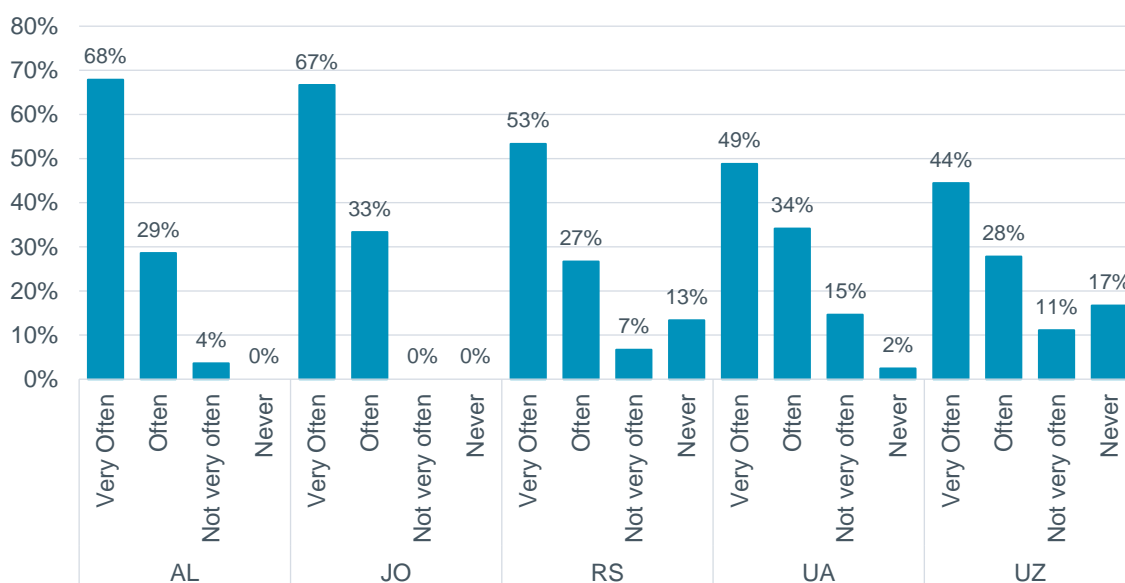
- Literacy and numeracy
- Technical competences
- Key competences
- Relationship with authorities and public sector
- Skills needs analyses
- Micro and small enterprises support and development
- Informal economy enhancement
- Advocacy for measures and policies in favour of young people
- Advocacy for measures and policies in favour of adult people
- Advocacy for measures and policies in favour of communities

A 3. The CONTENT of CSOs activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises technical competences (e.g. vocational skills, technical skills, digital skills, other job-related skills, etc.)



Regarding **key competences**, all the CSOs surveyed make it a priority. Albanian CSOs come out on top with 68% who say that their learning content focuses on key competences “very often”. Uzbek CSOs devote the least amount of their learning content to key competences, but 44% still say it is “very often” (see Figure A 4).

A 4. The CONTENT of CSOs activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises Key competences (e.g. learning to learn, teamwork, leadership, communication, languages, public speaking, self-confidence, entrepreneurship, etc.).



These findings demonstrate that CSOs in the Partner Countries surveyed contribute to human capital development. At the same time, the variations among countries, especially regarding technical competences (See Figure A 3), suggest that generalisations cannot be made, but there is now scope for further investigation.

CSOs were also asked to indicate the most effective learning environments. The majority of survey respondents said that in-person environments worked best. In Albania, this is true for 89% of the CSOs; in Uzbekistan, 67% of respondents agreed; for both Jordan and Serbia, 60% agreed; and in Ukraine, 46% agreed. CSOs in Albania and Serbia prefer an on-the-job-training environment by 64% and 40%, respectively, which attests to the importance CSOs in these countries give to employment-related services. Online environments are perceived as being very effective by CSOs in Jordan (56%) and Albania (38%). In the other countries, CSOs regarded them as very effective to a much lower extent: less than 22%.

The significant finding from this study is that CSOs consider in-presence learning environments as indispensable, either as a single modality or in combination with online learning (or hybrid mode). The online modality, whether synchronous or asynchronous, was assessed as insufficient for learning activities by almost all the CSOs interviewed; indeed, they regard personal contact with and among beneficiaries as a necessary vehicle of the learning process.

CSOs carefully assess the needs of the learners they serve. Understanding and addressing needs with appropriate support activities is a CSO's signature. In accession countries, needs assessment was found to be well-structured. For example, a CSO evaluated training needs in the region of Albania hit by de-industrialisation to design short-term courses that would create adult employment opportunities. Other Albanian CSOs connect returning migrants to local businesses; this requires understanding what both returning migrants and potential employers need. In Serbia, CSOs active in the education-to-work transition combine research and interviews for a granular understanding of training needs. In practice, they utilise existing study results or conduct new ones. If neither option is available, they interview learners to ascertain their strengths and needs and regularly monitor the labour market to keep abreast of profiles that are in demand.

Thus, assessing the training needs of both learners and the labour market is common to the accession region; its purpose is to ensure that non-formal training matches the labour market skills demand. Two methods are inherent to this approach: regular consultation with social partners (e.g., employer associations and trade unions) and relevant public bodies to remain up-to-date and anticipate trends and guide learners through counselling and the training provision based on employment prospects instead of personal preference alone.

In Uzbekistan, needs are assessed through polling and surveying the beneficiaries or during individual interviews. In Tajikistan, an organisation specialising in adult learning collects data and information on training needs through public institutions and civil society partners. One organisation interviewed in Morocco carried out background research on the development prospects of a given region. It held focus groups in that region to assess potential participants' learning needs. In Jordan, focus groups are used to detect training needs. One Jordanian organisation researches to analyse needs and then tests the results against the organisation's theory of change.

CSO networks at the European level demonstrate the ability to detect and react rapidly to emerging trends that concern network members and their beneficiaries. With their networks' support, CSOs quickly introduced elements of digital citizenship education to provide digital skills and competencies; the objective is to mitigate new divides forming as a direct consequence of the digitalisation of work and life. Digital citizenship, education in global citizenship, environmental sustainability, and sustainable development are topics that CSOs can tackle faster than formal education can.

2.7. Flexible provision and innovation to match learner needs

CSOs invest in **pedagogies** that support learners and motivate them to use non-formal and informal learning. They aim to diversify what they offer so that it is learner-centred and jobseeker-centred; this approach characterises the work of many CSOs across countries and regions. Pedagogies are critical for CSOs because the people with whom they work are often youth who have dropped out of school, adults with low or incomplete qualifications, individuals looking for a second chance at an education or a new career, migrants and returning migrants, and women who want to start or return to employment. Widening access to learning and employment, especially among those less inclined to enrol in formal education programmes or active labour market measures, is embedded in the mission of many CSOs.

In accession countries, **appreciative inquiry** and **participatory approaches** are methods that are used by CSOs as they help individuals discover their strengths and understand how they can contribute to society. These methods also include training, career guidance, access to public employment services, and other public services. Looking beyond formal settings, working outside traditional institutions, and ensuring learners are motivated to consider future possibilities are at the core of these methods.

Generally speaking, non-formal learning in Albania and Serbia tends to be well-planned, from needs assessment conducted by CSOs to adapting a learning plan as closely as possible to the individual's situation. Connecting with potential future employers remains crucial, especially when learners are certified after completing a course or training. Though the certificates issued by CSOs are not usually accredited, the quality and credibility of the delivered course improves when certification involves a panel of assessors from secondary school.

Entrepreneurial learning is a relevant tool for developing self-employment and a sense of initiative when navigating the labour market. Some CSOs support trainees in their start-up phase and help them network. Entrepreneurship and related key competences add value to what CSOs offer, especially compared to formal education.

By working with minority groups, CSOs develop cultural awareness and a profound understanding of **cultural diversity**. This endows them with the ability to adapt to specific beneficiary needs and expectations; they can also call upon the services of trusted individuals or mediators to further enhance their capacity to reach out to beneficiaries from diverse backgrounds. When engaging in this work sphere, CSOs take a long-term view of non-formal learning and personal development.

Most non-formal learning on offer is characterised by short courses, a mix of theory and practice, ready-to-use skills, and, in many cases, a smooth transition to employment. The training content is not necessarily available through formal education. This flexibility allows CSOs to take action in emergencies or in remote areas where the government or businesses may be unable to deliver.

In Uzbekistan, a CSO offers free information and consultations with doctors and lawyers to women who are victims of violence. The organisation also has a microfinancing programme to sustain vocational skills for women. Along with this programme, the CSO has established sectoral training centres based in VET schools to provide short-term courses in 18 subjects with local teachers and trainers in 13 Uzbek regions.

In Tajikistan, an adult learning association promotes non-formal and informal learning along with international tools such as GlobALE⁴² to train teachers to use interactive methods for adult teaching and learning. One CSO addresses young and adult learners to whom it offers the development of transversal skills such as communication, critical thinking, social entrepreneurial skills, and life competences, including reproductive health and the prevention of sexual violence. Moreover, it develops skills for employment by applying pedagogical methods that require interactivity and creativity. Adult courses run the gamut from literacy to learning how to use a smartphone, while other courses are specific to young girls. Learners in these Tajik courses value how short they are, how interactive they are, and how practical they are. Indeed, they can begin using the skills and knowledge acquired immediately. In addition to teachers, some CSOs hire coaches and mentors to reinforce the learning process and knowledge absorption. They also maintain long-term contact with beneficiaries and invite some to volunteer in the organisation. Tajik CSOs consider themselves more people-oriented than academic institutions. Indeed, through innovation, they can make a difference in everyone's life, not least those with low incomes and education.

In Morocco, a CSO offers young girls STEM-related mentorships. The organisation also has other programmes that focus on leadership and entrepreneurship. Young people apply to participate, and those who are selected sign a contract whereby they engage to complete the entire programme. Upon completing the programme, they receive a grant that allows them to put the skills acquired into practice. In this way, they can develop and implement an activity that benefits their community.

In Jordan, a CSO carries out capacity-building activities for other CSOs. One of these activities is in labour market observation and awareness raising regarding decent work and social rights for young people and women, two population groups that tend to have limited knowledge of these topics. Awareness raising is usually intertwined with training courses for employability.

In Europe, CSOs networks have developed specific expertise in citizenship education, the foundations of lifelong learning, and adult education and learning. Global citizenship education is gaining ground as a transformative and empowering approach to teaching, enabling learners to gain hands-on experience and/or use their own experience. CSO networks widely use it.

These large networks stay relevant through exchanges with other member organisations and through staff professional development. They also create new content related to emerging topics, such as lifelong learning in the context of the green and digital transitions, digitalisation in education and training, and financing lifelong learning policies, which they disseminate among their members and use for advocacy-related activities.

⁴² The curriculum GlobALE (CG) is a modular and competency-based framework curriculum for the training of adult educators world-wide (Unesco UIL et al., 2021)

2.8 Integration of learning and support services for holistic personal development

Integrating non-formal learning with the provision of additional services is another key feature of CSOs specialising in HCD. Their approach is to design and deliver mutually reinforcing actions to attain positive long-term outcomes for participants, not just short-term results. These include good quality job matching, self-employment, broad skill sets, the motivation to continue upskilling, fruitful access to public services and programmes, and renewed confidence in oneself and others. For this to be sustainable in the long term, a combination of training and other activities is required.

The in-depth interviews and the extended survey in seven countries have consistently supported the integrated approach, a characteristic of CSOs in different countries. The capacity to deliver integrated services is even more relevant under the following circumstances: when CSOs address fragility or complex personal backgrounds; in remote geographical areas where the number of providers is limited; among minority groups of population; with learners whose formal education attainment is low; and with individuals who have experienced violence, to cite a few examples.

This method usually begins with the assessment of individual learning needs. Follow-up activities may involve pre-training assistance and counselling, awareness of one's rights, non-formal training with various pedagogical tools, informal and peer learning, development of soft and life skills, enhancement of self-confidence and a sense of purpose, coaching, career guidance, job matching, advice after training and on-the-job, an alumni network, and the strengthening of community bonds. Further support involves validating non-formal learning, formal education and training, social programs, and integrating individuals in the job or the labour market.

In Albania, for example, prospective and returning migrants have been able to access public programmes to further their participation in CSO activities. Other services offered to migrants are psychological support, individual counselling, and employment guidance. In Serbia, the relationship with businesses is particularly useful in accompanying people from education to employment and, where needed, to follow the newly employed for up to one year to facilitate their integration into the work environment. These examples of integrated support services in accession countries show that CSOs focus on consolidating long-term results.

In Uzbekistan, too, the mix of HCD services is key, as demonstrated by what it takes to protect women from violence and harassment: information that includes raising awareness about one's rights and overcoming economic dependence. An Uzbek CSO offers free health and legal advice as well as micro-financing and vocational skills for women in rural areas. In Morocco, training is matched with community engagement. In Jordan, various CSOs provide training while raising awareness about the rights granted by the labour legislation and anti-discrimination law. One Jordanian CSO uses evidence to inform its raising awareness activities, given that some trainers are also researchers who regularly monitor legislation and government action. While it is common for CSOs to maintain contact with alumni and invite them to attend new events, a method found in Tajikistan is to involve former participants in volunteering for the organisation.

2.9 Ensuring quality throughout service delivery: from conceptualisation to evaluation and connecting learning with sustainable employment

The CSOs interviewed, and their networks tend to view quality assurance of their services as a continuous improvement process. This is how the interviewed organisations generally understand quality. However, they may apply quality assurance in different forms and degrees, varying from structured to loose modalities.

In the accession region, we can observe various quality assurance measures in non-formal learning and transition to employment. First, CSOs invest in their programmes' quality of trainers and experts to ensure quality. Second, CSOs regularly contact public and private VET centres to coordinate learning content. Third, they are flexible and adapt the curricula to meet learners' specific needs instead of simply deploying training courses used by other providers. Fourth, they set internal quality standards for the organisation to meet the expectations of learners, the public administration or donors. Last but not least, CSOs follow up with post-training activities for trainees and partners.

Interviewees in candidate countries such as Albania and Serbia highlighted that their method involves assuring quality at each step in the activity cycle from the beginning to the end. This requires liaising with partners and donors continuously. They concluded that such an approach to quality assurance creates trust in the community.

In Uzbekistan, the CSOs' understanding of quality assurance leans towards compliance with government requirements. In their view, improvements in quality depend upon policy and legislation changes, which could be informed by CSOs and other organisations' feedback and advocacy. The quality indicators used in Uzbekistan include the employment rate of programme graduates and the number of loans given to self-employed people.

In Tajikistan, an adult learning umbrella organisation dealing with formal and non-formal learning has introduced more interactive teaching and learning methods in training adult trainers, thanks to the GlobALE curriculum. The programme was improved progressively based on participants' feedback. Progressive improvement has also been used to modernise the process of validating non-formal and informal learning.

Another organisation is working on internal processes to raise transparency and accountability and promote a culture of teamwork with a view to improving quality. The approach of yet another organisation is to invest in external processes through an agreement with sector employer organisations to assess learners at the end of training. The organisation also uses the student evaluation of teachers as a stimulus for self-improvement. Professional development seems to improve the quality of provision and is a tool organisations often use.

In Morocco, the organisation adopted a mechanism whereby a CSO board member supervised each project manager. They discuss the project idea and design and provide advice. This measure allows for staff learning and development; over time, it has increased staff members' motivation. In Jordan, the training materials are reviewed internally and externally. Another quality measure is to assess learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes before and after the training programme to evaluate improvement.

A feedback culture is encouraged at the European network level to improve the activities for members and outside stakeholders. For example, at the end of multi-annual programmes, long feedback sessions are organised to identify what worked well. An example of an improvement introduced based on these feedback sessions is more focused training for network members to strengthen expertise instead of dispersing knowledge and skills over multiple subjects.

2.10 Advocacy for a learning culture, inclusion, decent living and opportunities for all

Advocacy is a significant instrument whereby CSOs formulate and disseminate their position on subjects related to lifelong learning to influence the public debate and agenda. Issues CSOs advocate for are SDG4 and its targets, which include equal access to education, the right of adult people to participate in learning, and increased budgetary allocations, among others. CSOs take a stand that reflects their respective vision of education, training and employment, which in some cases represents the viewpoint of specific groups such as students, teachers, parents, ethnic minorities or communities. Positions vary depending on civil and political values, which also orients the choice of each CSO regarding which umbrella association and network to affiliate.

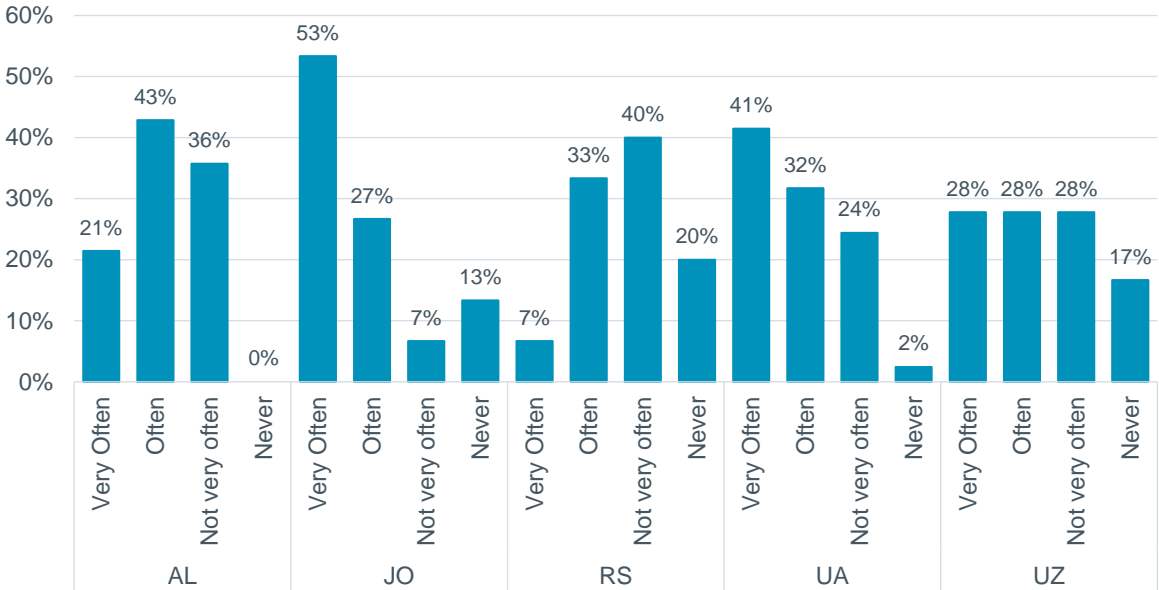
All CSOs view learning and skills development as a means to serve a person’s development holistically rather than serving the labour market through a supposedly optimal combination of technical skills, life skills, key competences, and skills for jobs, which would rely on a segmented view. Accordingly, they advocate for education and training policies that put human development at the centre.

CSOs formulate opinions, statements, and reactions and publicise research results to underpin their education, training and employment positions. These tools strengthen CSOs’ advocacy and facilitate their direct influence on the public discourse. In this way, CSOs can have an indirect impact on policy processes. Accurate and frequent data collection and evidence-based reports are increasingly important to provide media with just-in-time information and channel key messages. CSOs use raising awareness and advocacy to influence public opinion and change how people perceive lifelong learning in terms of convenience. In Albania and Serbia, CSOs address their national institutions with advocacy based on EU achievements in education, training, and employment, which are relevant components of the EU accession process.

Advocacy is a relevant CSO activity at the national and EU network levels. It will likely succeed when it involves large CSOs and networks with well-developed communication capabilities. Advocacy and communication are mutually beneficial, but their boundary is sometimes blurred. The difference between these two instruments is that advocacy paves the way and sets the agenda for policy dialogue. Individual CSOs and cross-country networks launch focused campaigns regularly to raise awareness about specific topics, such as people’s rights to education and training and social rights in employment. Advocacy was the top activity in Jordan among the CSOs participating in the ETF study.

Regarding support provided to beneficiaries in their relationships with authorities and the public sector, Jordanian organisations responded that they engage in advocacy “very often” (53%), while all other countries present more balanced responses ranging from 41% to 21%, as shown in Figure A 5. This is possibly due to a higher demand for mediation by its citizens and a more significant number of Jordanian CSOs responding compared to other countries, which can be attributed to a more substantial need for services of this kind. Mediation services in other countries may be less necessary, or other structures may cater to this need.

A 5. The CONTENT of CSOs activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises: Relationship with authorities and public sector (e.g. addressing public administration, requesting certificates, enrolling in school, enrolling in training courses, enrolling in employment services, etc).



2.11 Engaging with communities: civil dialogue for policy influence

Civil dialogue is a structured way for governments to consult with CSOs, and it usually revolves around specific topics, policy issues, or problems. Governments and parliaments use a range of consultation methods, including a collection of feedback online, public debates, public hearings, ad hoc meetings, or institutionalised councils that have a mandate on education and training, which is the case in Ukraine. A new draft law, outstanding social issues, and/or funding allocation are common reasons to consult CSOs at the national or local level. Civil dialogue may also be prompted by reports published by CSOs, such as data on education and training, as well as monitoring reports on implementing public measures.

Among its advantages, civil dialogue can lead to a more granular understanding of social problems, problem re-formulation, informed debates about possible solutions, and citizen participation. However, direct influence on decision-making is not a given. Results vary depending on the context and the nature of the issues that can catalyse consensus or be divisive. The capacity for dialogue capacity on all sides and values at stake also influence results. Civil dialogue can be effective or simulated; the latter is becoming more frequent in parallel to the civic space restrictions observed in several countries over the last decade. Both individual CSOs and large networks are monitoring this situation.

Governmental agencies and departments managing public funds allocated to groups who live in vulnerable situations use CSOs as project implementers because of their specific competence and outreach capacity, both socially and geographically. This type of public body, which exists in Albania and Serbia, indirectly contributes to the development of CSOs and can function as a facilitator of civil dialogue. In Tajikistan, national CSO councils are run under the auspices of the president, and the governors chair regional councils. They meet twice a year to collect input, plan activities for the following year, seek solutions to problems, and discuss emerging issues. These Councils offer the opportunity for CSOs and other non-state actors to express their views; however, their role resembles a management body rather than a forum for civil dialogue. In Jordan, there is a mechanism for CSOs to raise issues of public concern and submit requests, but there is no procedure binding the government to respond or act.

Although difficult to measure, policy influence is characterised by CSOs' effective contribution to parliamentary debates, the drafting of strategies and laws, policy formulation, and programmes at a national or sub-national level. Policymakers endorsing CSO reports and statements, modifying existing provisions, and accepting terminology changes based on civil dialogue further demonstrate the impact on policy processes. The effectiveness of policy influence varies among countries and depends on the actors involved.

The CSOs interviewed in Albania claim that CSOs made a significant change in policymaking culture by introducing evidence collection. Some CSOs have contributed to EU Annual Progress reports, OECD policy advice on public administration reform, and CEDEFOP and bilateral donors' analyses through research-based recommendations. Having raised their credibility due to their professional understanding of education and labour market situations, these CSOs offer government advice on legislative and policy frameworks and guidelines. At the same time, some of the CSOs that used to contribute to policy-oriented debates and provide advice have progressively disengaged in Albania and Serbia. The disengagement was driven by different factors, including one or more of the following: the reduced space for policy dialogue, the decision to focus on the local level where needs are more acute, and the growing number of CSOs, which generates competition.

The context in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is different because many CSOs are government-driven or closely connected to the government and are often referred to as governmental NGOs or GONGOs. In this case, the interface with policy-making processes is a given, and it can take place via government-appointed executives through direct line reporting to public agencies or other means. The government entrusts organisations with the following: background research on new legislation; input into planning non-formal learning; improvements to existing provisions like the validation of non-formal learning for adult people in Tajikistan; seats in formal councils to deliver opinions and recommendations; and

learning from neighbouring countries' practices. However, some CSOs in Uzbekistan act as a bridge between the citizens' voices, policy, and decision-makers. CSOs are beginning to become more independent.

In Jordan, many CSOs believe it is challenging to influence the policy process, but they act as if it is possible. Even though their recommendations are generally not considered, CSOs deliver statements on the government's decisions and monitor the implementation of public policies to hold the government accountable. Official communication channels exist with the government, and CSOs deliver data and analyses that eventually support government reporting, for example, on SDGs. CSOs interviewed in Morocco do not try to influence policy; instead, they focus on communities and consider citizens' limited trust in government and political actors.

European-wide networks have strong experience with advocacy, engage in policy dialogue, and are advancing onto a path of policy influence according to Article 11 of the Treaty of the EU. A relevant achievement was creating the LLL volunteer interest group in the EU Parliament, an informal alliance of MEPs that includes all political groups represented. The method has made it possible for LLL to be more visible on the European agenda, raise awareness about the holistic nature of LLL and contribute, directly or indirectly, to MEPs' support for increased EU budgetary allocations for LLL.

2.12 Networking at the local, country and international levels

CSO networks are created to reinforce representativity, scale up advocacy and action, and build synergy. Networks at national and international levels have grown in this century, driven by internal and external incentives, including increased impact, access to information, training, peer learning, catalysing resources, joining forces for grant applications, better-structured communication, and greater legitimacy.

In Albania and Serbia, there are at least three ways to network: first, networking with similar entities in the country and networking at the local level with partners that CSOs regularly cooperate with, be it schools, companies, local authorities and public offices, and/or other CSOs; this approach to networking remains informal, yet it allows trainers to learn from each other, mobilise resources for projects, and exchange with partners on project implementation. Second, the mix of local, national, and international networking has added value in terms of opportunities for knowledge and practice sharing, access to information, new partnerships, visibility and recognition as an organisation that carries out relevant work. Third, membership or affiliation to Europe-wide networks facilitates participation in EU projects, timely updates on education and training policy developments, learning about innovation in teaching, peer visits, and contacts with different European organisations. It ultimately increases the legitimacy of individual CSOs. All CSOs have their network via participant cohorts.

In accession countries, CSOs contribute to HCD through services that support the education-to-work transition. In this respect, companies are a relevant part of these CSO networks. One interviewee said maintaining smooth cooperation among trainees and future employers is essential for training effectiveness. The connection has a long-term vision built on mutual trust, an in-depth understanding of employers' and learners' needs and quality assurance. It is worth noting that skills development for tourism, including catering and hospitality, mechanics, and other sectors, implies developing networks with small businesses. Transition to employment also means building networks with institutions such as employment services.

In Uzbekistan, emerging CSOs connect with global networks that offer guidance on the organisations' development and provide a platform to exchange with NGOs worldwide. Other CSOs are not part of networks at this stage but work towards finding partners to cooperate to establish a national network. The adult learning umbrella organisation in Tajikistan belongs to a broader organisation in the Asia-Pacific region and partners with organisations focused on inclusive education for disabled people. In addition to the above-mentioned advantages of networking, one more benefit reported in Tajikistan is the work of volunteer groups.

In Jordan, the experience of some CSOs is that networking with government institutions is crucial to receiving public funding. One of the interviewed organisations had access to EU projects; however, it was found that the EU funding requirements were not suitable and, in the long term, not viable for the organisation. More generally, this CSO concluded that belonging to networks may be more time-consuming than beneficial; however, it remains connected with a coalition that includes government representatives, so it continues to participate in discussions on issues related to relevant policies. The CSO interviewed in Morocco is part of the Innovation Group for Youth, a recent UNDP-led network of organisations that promotes youth empowerment; moreover, by collaborating with embassies, it has access to a pool of international speakers and researchers.

European-wide networks of CSOs in education and learning were consolidated during the 2000s. They now offer members a stronger voice in the public debate and can influence the European agenda. They organise communication campaigns, public events, policy briefs, research and project results publication, stakeholder relationships, and a mix of tools for very effective advocacy. Since their inception, the networks have engaged in civil dialogue, progressively becoming interlocutors for EU institutions, which has raised their capacity to influence policy.

The European networks apply for project funding to develop and share new teaching and learning methodologies, build their members' operational and policy-influencing capacities, gather evidence on what works in LLL to bridge theory and practice and develop transnational cooperation involving EU and non-EU countries. Their work does not directly address individual learners but rather enhances members' effectiveness in doing so. These CSO networks have multi-layer governance structures, such as general assemblies, advisory and executive bodies, and elective roles with well-defined mandates, and they provide the range of their diverse members with representation in priority settings.

After this Chapter, we organise a typology of the CSO approaches according to their intended purpose for a reasoned summary of the characteristics that are analysed above.

Table 2 – Typology of approaches that CSOs use to attain impact in LLL and HCD

Provision of learning and employment services	
In-depth assessment of learning needs of beneficiary groups	To understand the needs to be addressed
Flexible and innovative teaching and learning to match learner needs	To differentiate teaching and learning to match individuals or groups
Intersection between learning and other support services	To follow up on training with additional support services
Quality assurance of the services on offer throughout all stages, from conceptualisation to delivery and evaluation	To guarantee that quality criteria are defined and applied in the service provision
Influencing the LLL and HCD discourse and policy	
Advocacy in favour of a learning culture, inclusion, decent living and opportunities for all	To bring the needs of vulnerable groups in the discourse on LLL and HCD
Civic dialogue with authorities and communities	To open dialogue and reach agreements on LLL and HCD initiatives
Policy influencing notably dialogue with decision-makers to shape the policy agenda, strategies and legislation	To guide and influence policy priorities and outcomes to effectively meet the needs of the society
Coalition and self-development	
Networking at local, country and international levels	To build a coalition on service provision and influencing
Organisational self-development	To learn as an organisation

CHAPTER 3 CSOs AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

EVOLVING PARTNERSHIPS IN HCD AND LLL: LOOKING BACK TO SPRING FORWARD

This chapter examines the critical role of CSOs in shaping the governance of emerging lifelong learning systems, and it focuses on four key areas:

- **CSO participation in the HCD policy cycle:** Explores how CSOs develop, implement, and evaluate HCD policies.
- **The added value of CSOs' contributions to the HCD sector:** Highlights the unique benefits and insights that CSOs bring to HCD
- **Budgeting of HCD programmes and CSO funding in lifelong learning:** Discusses the financial aspects, including how CSOs are funded and their role in budgeting HCD initiatives.
- **CSOs' stakes in the governance of lifelong learning:** Analyses the interests and influence of CSOs within the governance structures of lifelong learning systems.

Drawing on the findings from the ETF study and contemporary theories of governance and policy processes in HCD, this chapter explores how policymakers and governments can achieve more effective outcomes in human capital development by collaborating with CSOs. The involvement of CSOs in HCD—as advocates, partners in national and local policy dialogues, and providers of information and expertise—can enhance accountability, transparency, public awareness, and participation. By amplifying the voices of CSOs, governments can ensure that lifelong learning systems are more inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the needs of diverse communities.

3.1 Policy dialogue and CSOs' participation in the policy cycle

HCD systems and public policies are complex. The most significant challenge they face is rapid economic changes, making HCD needs unpredictable. The ETF partner countries have, for the most part, transitional economies or are developing countries. For this reason, they are particularly exposed to the profound structural shifts taking place so quickly. The Torino Process 2020 cycle identified the HCD key challenges as follows: a shrinking supply of skills and poor use of labour resources, the job market moving from transition to transformation, and the fact that education, training and skills development services have a challenge to keep up with such a rapid transformation.

The challenges faced by partner countries impact HCD policy implementation. Analysing partner countries' responses in the Torino Process assessment reveals important trends⁴³, they are listed below:

1. New national development strategies are linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. They redefine the scope of education, lifelong learning and VET policies for the next decade;
2. Active employment policies put into place immediate measures to mitigate unemployment, promote entrepreneurship, and better match job seekers with vacancies.
3. There is a push towards pro-business initiatives to enhance the involvement of the private sector in lifelong learning and employment policies while helping SMEs grow; and
4. There is a push towards redistributing responsibilities for policy and its implementation.

The paradigm shifts from a controlled HCD system where content is decided centrally to a more flexible system based on outcomes and performance slowly settles in at the policy and implementation

⁴³ Policies for system change and lifelong learning: Torino Process cross-country digest 2018-2021, ETF 2022,

levels. These policy shifts are reflected in new lifelong learning concepts and laws that partner countries have recently adopted. While preparing new strategies has helped countries create new conditions at the policy level, for many schools and VET providers, actual implementation continues to be a bottleneck for achieving the objectives of an innovative and flexible workforce. Complex changes are challenging to implement, budgets are limited, and many need a whole-of-society approach. The Torino Process and the ETF's assessments in partner countries all find that HCD policy implementation requires an integrated approach beyond the education and training sectors.

In this context of HCD, the role of CSOs is crucial. The ETF Survey explored the extent of participation of CSOs in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts and their contribution to HCD policy in non-formal learning, informal learning and employment. The picture varies considerably from country to country.

In **Albania**, there is limited involvement in the policy dialogue. 21.4% of CSOs reported to be involved regularly. Their stakeholders are mostly education providers (83.6% of CSOs) and CSO platforms/fora (61.1%), to a lesser extent, government institutions (55.6%) and national employment services (55.6%). Most CSOs connect with these stakeholders regularly or occasionally through monitoring reports or advocacy-related activities. Most CSOs consider their role complementary or collaborative to what governments do, while a considerable number say there is little or no communication between CSOs and governments. (See Annex 1)

Over half of surveyed CSOs in Jordan reported being involved in policy dialogue. Government institutions, CSO platforms and forums are reported to be major stakeholders for all surveyed CSOs, while education and training providers (67%), academic institutions (67%), national employment services (60%) and trade unions (57%) play an important role. An overwhelming majority of surveyed CSOs noted a connection to their stakeholders through monitoring and evaluation reports (89%), advocacy (86%), reporting on the use of budget resources (78%), and disseminating results of analysis and research (75%). Half of the surveyed organisations in Jordan stated that their collaborative role is significant. A relatively high percentage of CSOs stated that their role vis-a-vis the government is indifferent, which means that CSOs do not inform the government, and the government does not inform CSOs. (See Annex 2)

In **Serbia**, although there is limited CSO involvement regularly (26.7%), more than half of them are occasionally involved in policy dialogue with governmental institutions (75%), national employment services (66.7%), education and training providers (50%), and CSO networks (50%). Most CSOs either regularly or occasionally report to these stakeholders to disseminate the results of their analyses and research (75%), communicate their advocacy work (66.7%) or draw up monitoring reports (41.7%). Most CSOs consider their role as either collaborative (66.7%) or complementary (53.3%) – a much lesser number see their role as advisory (33.3%) or alternative (26.7%).

Stakeholders' involvement and policy dialogue are not the main activities for surveyed CSOs, but 26.7% of them are regularly involved, and 53.3% are occasionally involved. In total, 20% are not involved in policy dialogue regarding non-formal learning, informal learning and employment. The finding has also been confirmed by recent research on the overall CSO sector in Serbia, where three-quarters of CSOs believed that their influence on public policy, at both the national and local levels, is minimal, stating that "higher impact requires greater involvement of citizens in CSO activities, greater visibility in the media, and better networking and co-operation with other similar organisations"⁴⁴.

In **Tajikistan**, a few surveyed CSOs are regularly involved in policy dialogue (12%), although more are engaged occasionally (50%). Their stakeholders are predominantly governmental institutions (50% of CSOs) and education and training providers (37%). Most CSOs report to these stakeholders either regularly or occasionally. These significant ties are reinforced through monitoring reports (50%), evaluation reports (62.5%), and the use of budget resources (63.6%). In Tajikistan, more than half of surveyed CSOs consider their role as collaborative vis-a-vis the government (56.3%), followed by complimentary (37.5%) and advisory (37.5%).

⁴⁴ Velat 2019. See https://act.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CSO-Sector-in-Serbia-2019_Summary_WEB.pdf

In **Ukraine**, most surveyed CSOs said they were involved in policy dialogue (56.1% regularly involved, 31.7% occasionally involved), and their stakeholders, to a great extent, are government institutions (80.6%), but also education and training providers (63.9%), and other CSO networks and platforms (61.1%). Employers and National employment services are also important stakeholders, accounting for 30.6% and 36.1%, respectively. Most CSOs report to these stakeholders regularly or occasionally. When it comes to the content of their reporting, the very important or important ones are monitoring reports (78.6% of CSOs) and disseminating the results of analysis and research (78.5%), but also reporting on the use of budget resources (64.3%). Most CSOs see their role as complementary (68.3%) or collaborative (63.4%) compared to government structures. At the same time, fewer CSOs (29.3%) see their role as advisory (consultants on government policies, programmes, and other decisions in HCD) or alternative to the government (34.1%) (see Annex 5).

In other words, the case of Ukraine is particularly interesting, as CSOs specializing in HCD play an active role in policy dialogue with the government and other stakeholders. Many of these CSOs regularly participate in discussions on non-formal learning, informal learning, and employment, highlighting the importance of policy dialogue. Most CSOs involved in these dialogues frequently interact with governmental institutions, which are their primary stakeholders. Additionally, many CSOs engage with education and training providers, such as vocational schools and training centres, as well as CSO platforms and forums. However, they are less active in working with employment-related stakeholders like employers and national employment services, and trade unions are generally not considered key stakeholders by these CSOs. Thus, Ukrainian CSOs primarily focus their policy dialogue efforts on government institutions while maintaining connections with CSO networks and educational providers.

In **Uzbekistan**, half of surveyed respondents answered that they are not interested or involved in policy dialogue. Most CSOs engaged in policy dialogue communicate with government institutions, trade unions and education and training providers, mainly through monitoring reports and disseminating analysis and research results.

In summary, the ETF study found that there is a substantial difference among countries when it comes to the CSOs' role in HCD policy dialogue. HCD systems and policies in ETF partner countries face significant challenges due to rapid economic changes, resulting in unpredictable skill demands and a job market in transition. Partner countries are adopting new strategies aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing lifelong learning, employment policies, and private sector involvement. However, implementation remains challenging due to complex changes, budget constraints, and the need for a whole-of-society approach. CSO participation in HCD policy dialogue varies by country, with differing levels of involvement and impact, particularly in Albania, Jordan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. While some CSOs actively engage with government and other stakeholders, others face barriers to effective collaboration and influence in policy-making.

3.2 Added value of CSOs' contributions to the HCD sector

The ETF survey also explored the added value of CSOs' contribution to the HCD sector compared to other organisations in the public and private sectors, as well as how future CSO contributions to the HCD sector might look. The diversity of cases is underscored, exploring the critical role that CSOs play in shaping and enhancing HCD. It highlights how CSOs, through their grassroots engagement, advocacy, and policy dialogue, contribute unique perspectives and innovative approaches that complement governmental efforts. By fostering inclusive participation, promoting lifelong learning, and addressing formal education and employment services gaps, CSOs add significant value to the HCD sector, driving progress towards more adaptive and resilient systems.

In **Albania**, most CSOs stated their added value as supporting the effective education, training and other learning processes. Another substantial added value is about detecting the needs of people out of formal education and employment and bringing their voices to policy dialogue. Regarding the improvement of policy dialogue and public consultation outcomes, as well as the guarantee of

transparency of public consultations, they are attributed to having less added value. However, they are still reported as being important by some surveyed CSOs. At the same time, most CSOs do not consider their current added value as improving the quality of HCD policy dialogue or providing innovative and independent advice to shape HCD policies.

In [Jordan](#), surveyed CSOs rate high their comparative added value in HCD policy dialogue quality, supporting the effectiveness of education and training, improving outcomes and guaranteeing transparency of policy dialogue and public consultations. At the same time, providing independent advice to shape HCD policies is considered less of a priority or added value.

In [Serbia](#), most surveyed CSOs believe their primary added value is their ability to detect the needs of groups outside the formal learning and employment system and bring their voices to policy dialogue while providing innovative advice to shape HCD policies. To a lesser extent, but also important is the added value of supporting the effectiveness of education, training and other learning processes. The majority of surveyed CSOs attributed no added value to improving the outcomes of policy dialogue and public consultation, guaranteeing their transparency, independently evaluating HCD policy outcomes, and monitoring skills policy implementation (see Annex 3).

In [Tajikistan](#), most surveyed CSOs consider their comparative added value to be detecting the needs of groups outside formal education and employment, followed by supporting the effectiveness of education and training and monitoring skills policy implementation. At the same time, surveyed CSOs considered facilitating transparency and accountability of HCD policy implementation and improving the outcome of policy dialogue and public consultations as less of a priority (see Annex 4).

In [Ukraine](#), CSOs consider their added value to be supporting effective education, training, and other learning processes and providing independent and innovative advice to shape HCD policies. Detecting the needs of groups outside the formal learning and employment system and monitoring skills policy implementation are reported as having less added value but are still important. At the same time, guaranteeing the transparency of public consultations, improving outcomes of policy dialogue and public consultations, and facilitating accountability and transparency of HCD policy implementation are not considered as having added value by more than 40% of surveyed CSOs.

According to surveyed CSOs in Uzbekistan, their primary added value is to support the effectiveness of education, training and other learning processes and provide innovative advice to shape HCD policies.

Most CSOs in Ukraine, Albania, Serbia, Jordan, and Tajikistan plan to strengthen their contribution to HCD. They perceive their added value primarily in supporting the effectiveness of education, training, and other learning processes, as well as in identifying the needs of groups outside formal education and employment and bringing these voices into policy dialogue. Additionally, CSOs are valued for providing innovative advice to shape HCD policies. However, improving the outcomes of policy dialogue and ensuring transparency is seen as less significant. Despite this, CSOs demonstrate a clear self-awareness of their strengths in service provision, inclusivity, and innovation while recognizing their limitations in influencing higher-level policy.

3.3 Budgeting of HCD programmes and CSOs' funding in HCD and LLL

Understanding how CSOs in these sectors are funded is vital, as budgets are not just financial plans but powerful tools for setting priorities and driving the agenda. Typically, state actors are responsible for defining these budgets, ensuring they align with national priorities, and effectively allocating national funds. They also play a key role in attracting additional resources from international donors, private sector partners, or other stakeholders to complement domestic funding. Furthermore, state actors are tasked with the coordination, monitoring, and accountability of these funds to ensure that HCD and LLL programs are implemented efficiently and achieve their intended outcomes. In this context, the funding of CSOs becomes particularly important, as these organizations often fill critical

gaps in service delivery, advocacy, and community engagement. However, the reliance on state-defined budgets can sometimes limit CSOs' flexibility and independence, making it essential to examine the dynamics of funding sources, allocation processes, and the overall impact on the effectiveness of CSOs in advancing HCD and LLL goals.

The ETF study also examined the funding mechanisms for CSOs involved in HCD and LLL. It explored how these organizations secure resources, the challenges they face in obtaining consistent and adequate funding, and the impact of financial constraints on their ability to contribute effectively to HCD initiatives. By analysing the funding landscape, the study aims to shed light on the sustainability of CSO contributions and identify opportunities for enhancing their financial support within national HCD frameworks.

In **Albania**, donor funding is a significant source for 92.9% of surveyed CSOs. Government funding is the primary source for 46.4% of CSOs. It is followed by 28.6% of surveyed CSOs that are principally self-financed. In light of this, it is interesting to note that, as previously mentioned, the Albanian CSOs surveyed have low involvement in policy dialogue. At the same time, 55.6% of them consider governmental institutions to be their major stakeholders.

In **Jordan**, donor funding was a significant source for 53% of the CSOs surveyed. Self-financing follows with a slightly lesser share (47%). Government funding accounts for a very low share of funding (13% of the CSOs surveyed declared it a major funding source). Despite this, Jordanian CSOs consider governmental institutions their major stakeholders, and more than half are involved in the policy dialogue.

In **Serbia**, 93.3% of CSOs reported donors as their primary funding source, while 20% said self-financing is their major source. A relatively low share of CSOs (13.3%) reported that government funding is their major source of income. As previously mentioned, regular involvement in policy dialogue was reported by slightly more than one-fourth of CSOs. At the same time, governmental institutions are major stakeholders for 75% of the surveyed CSOs (see Annex 3).

The surveyed CSOs in **Ukraine** are primarily funded by donors (for 65.9%, donations represent a major source of funding), followed by self-financing (29.3%) and a tiny share of governmental funds (9.8%). The picture presented in the previous section showed that more than half of CSOs at the time of the survey were involved in policy dialogue, and a substantial share (more than 80%) considered governmental institutions as their major stakeholders.

Uzbekistan paints a very different picture, with 40% of CSOs surveyed as self-financed, followed by 32% that the government funds. At the same time, a very low percentage reported donor funding as the primary source. At the same time, half of the CSOs surveyed were not involved in or interested in policy dialogue (see Annex 6).

While experiences vary, a clear commonality is that most CSOs rely on donor funding. Government funding represents a much less significant share of funding, with Uzbekistan as the exception. Is there a correlation between the involvement of social partners in HCD-related policy dialogue, governance issues and financing? The ETF survey's limitations do not allow for a definitive answer. Still, several methodological and research documents confirm a correlation, including the 2019 ETF methodology to assess governance and financing of vocational education and training⁴⁵.

The ETF survey also allows the following conclusions to be drawn regarding funding:

- When funding decisions are shared and participative, funding needs will be clear amongst all stakeholders. Establishing dialogue at the priority-setting stage generates trust and respect among state actors and CSOs.
- Making funding available to CSOs to implement agreed actions in education, training and employment support is a solution where all sides win. For learners and people in need of upskilling

⁴⁵ The methodology states that "an important aspect is whether a given strategy captures all the stakeholders required for the successful implementation of the strategy and entrusts them with specific and clear responsibilities." (ETF, 2019, p.17, 19).

or employment support, it means help is available. For state actors, it means inclusive societies can be achieved. For CSOs, it means developing their expertise to achieve their objectives.

- Facilitating funding accessibility is crucial for fostering an enabling environment for CSOs, ensuring their independence and critical mindset is preserved. This support is indispensable for sustaining innovation in non-formal and informal education.

Examining how CSOs involved in HCD and LLL are funded is essential because HCD budgets are powerful agenda-setting tools that include various stakeholders. In general, state actors are responsible for defining budgets to align with national priorities, the allocation of national funds, attracting additional funding, and overall funding coordination, monitoring, and accountability. The analysis of CSO funding within HCD and LLL underscores the critical role that budgetary decisions play in shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of these organizations. CSOs often fill essential gaps in service delivery, advocacy, and community engagement, particularly in areas where state interventions may be limited. However, their heavy reliance on donor funding, as observed in Albania, Jordan, Serbia, and Ukraine, highlights vulnerabilities, mainly regarding financial stability and long-term sustainability. In contrast, Uzbekistan's higher reliance on self-financing and government funding suggests a different dynamic but raises questions about the broader inclusivity and engagement of CSOs in policy dialogues.

The ETF study reveals a general trend where CSOs are increasingly aware of their strengths in delivering on-the-ground services and addressing educational and employment needs. Still, they also recognize their limited influence over policy dialogue and shaping national HCD strategies. This reflects a broader need for more inclusive and participative budgeting processes, where CSOs are actively involved in setting priorities and determining funding allocations from the outset. Moreover, the findings suggest that when funding decisions are collaborative and transparent, they foster greater trust and cooperation between state actors and CSOs. This collaborative approach clarifies funding needs and enhances the effectiveness of CSOs in implementing their missions, leading to more inclusive and resilient educational and employment systems.

In conclusion, while the current funding landscape for CSOs in HCD and LLL presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for enhancing their role through better integration into national budgeting processes and ensuring more accessible and diversified funding streams. This would bolster their independence and innovation and strengthen their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the broader HCD agenda.

3.4 CSOs' stakes in the participatory governance of HCD and LLL systems

Participatory governance in LLL systems refers to the inclusive and collaborative decision-making process that involves multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, CSOs, and citizens. This approach ensures that the voices of diverse groups are heard, fostering a more responsive and adaptive education system. CSOs play a crucial role in this governance model by representing the interests of marginalized communities, advocating for inclusive policies, and bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers. Citizens, empowered through CSOs, contribute their perspectives and needs, making LLL systems more equitable and aligned with the realities of those they serve. The stakes for CSOs in participatory governance are significant, as they influence policy outcomes and help shape a more democratic and inclusive LLL framework.

Countries that aim to set up or have operationalised lifelong learning systems have to maintain, sustain, and upscale existing partnerships among state and private sector actors as well as civil society at different levels: national, regional, local and sectoral; the goal is to co-create solutions that actors cannot attain alone⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ ETF-UNESCO, 2021, p.9

Recent European Union-level developments illustrate how education and training systems in the EU increasingly rely on multiple actors, including CSOs. In 2022, the European Council issued two recommendations: Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) and Microcredentials. The ILA Recommendation invites the EU Member States to provide people with support through training entitlements in individual learning accounts. The aim is to grant individuals access to training opportunities and the recognition of training outcomes. It recommends establishing public registries of recognised training providers. It invites EU Member States to involve social partners and all relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, to enhance the rate of adult participation in learning opportunities⁴⁷. The Recommendation on Microcredentials strongly interrelates with the ILA Recommendation. It encourages the EU Member States to support the ongoing and emerging development of micro-credentials by formal education providers and within non-formal and informal learning settings, including companies, social partners, CSOs, local authorities and private providers⁴⁸. These EU-level initiatives recognise the contribution of CSOs and other actors to the non-formal education and training scene and their contribution to the supply of relevant skills in the EU's labour market.

This example highlights the importance of participatory governance in shaping education and training systems within the European Union. By inviting CSOs and other stakeholders to participate in these initiatives, the EU recognizes the critical role of diverse voices in enhancing adult learning participation and ensuring that training opportunities are accessible and relevant. This approach not only promotes inclusivity but also leverages the unique contributions of CSOs in addressing the evolving needs of the labour market, demonstrating the effectiveness of participatory governance in achieving more comprehensive and responsive education systems.

In such a complex HCD context, CSOs can play an increasingly important role in the governance and development of HCD in partner countries. As noted earlier, the ETF study in Albania found that CSOs focused their activities on (a) education, awareness-raising and advocacy for promoting human rights, democracy, and volunteering and (b) skills promotion as their activities related to skills development. Regarding the content of CSOs' activities related to skills development, 75% of surveyed CSOs supported technical competency development, such as vocational skills, technical skills, digital skills, and other job-related skills. 60% provided support with key competencies, such as learning to learn, teamwork, leadership, communication, languages, public speaking, self-confidence, entrepreneurship, etc.

As a knowledge exchange and translation platform, policy dialogue aims to support evidence-based decision-making. It is deliberative in that emphasis is placed on the balanced presentation of evidence with ample room for reflection; the interaction format is a critical part of policy dialogue. In this regard, policy dialogue is considered the end of a process involving preliminary steps to prepare the activity. As a mode of governance, policy dialogue aims to formulate a plan, strategy or policy in a participatory manner. When involved in a participatory manner, CSOs are engaged in the policy process from the inside. Focus is given to exchanging knowledge, drafting documents, and facilitating debate among stakeholders to find common ground or compromise. As a negotiating instrument, policy dialogue provides a means of influencing governments on policy. This approach differs from policy dialogue as a mode of governance in that it is generally initiated or encouraged by non-state actors, such as development partners or lobbies, with a strategic objective⁴⁹.

Advocacy, by contrast, involves CSOs in the policy process from the outside. As advocates, CSOs address the public to trigger social change or pressure the political system to shape policy. The UNICEF Advocacy toolkit⁵⁰ defines advocacy as the deliberate process of directly or indirectly influencing decision-makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions

⁴⁷ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on individual learning accounts, 31 May 2022

⁴⁸ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, 25 May 2022.

⁴⁹ Robert E 2020, p.4

⁵⁰ UNICEF Advocacy toolkit was developed for the UNICEF Country offices in UNICEF's West and Central Africa region and provides a brief overview of strategies and tools that can be applied to strengthen advocacy efforts in the field of education.

that contribute to fulfilling different social measures. Indeed, advocacy seeks change in governance, attitudes, power, social relations, and institutional functions⁵¹.

In the case of Albania and the CSOs that took part in the ETF study, 21.4% of them confirmed to be often involved in policy dialogue regarding non-formal learning, informal learning and employment. 42.9 % were involved occasionally, and 35.7 % were not involved but would like to participate in policy dialogue. The issue of the lack of involvement of CSOs in policy dialogue in Albania has been confirmed by different studies. For example, the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development⁵² in Albania confirms similar findings. The Country Report: Albania 2019 shows that of the surveyed CSOs, 34% have participated in the work of advisory, consultative or working group bodies and committees. The same report notes that one of the main concerns of CSOs regarding their participation in public consultations remains the lack of trust in whether their recommendations will be taken into account by public institutions⁵³.

Nevertheless, in the case of CSOs and policy dialogue in Albania, very interesting practices exist, though they are not specific to the HCD sector. However, it is important to note that there is consistent progress and evolution in Albania regarding the participation of the CSO sector in formal structures. In July 2019, the Albanian government approved the Road Map for the Government Policy towards a More Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2019-2023⁵⁴. The document presents a series of actions and concrete measures. They include strengthening the legal framework with an emphasis on improving the registration issue, a strengthened institutional framework for the work of CSOs, more explicit and more transparent public funding mechanisms for CSOs programmes, inclusive involvement of CSOs in social service delivery on a national and local level according to standards, regulated consultations with CSOs in drafting new laws, a favourable tax policy for CSOs, a more conducive legal, fiscal, and institutional framework for the promotion of volunteering, and an enabling environment for the promotion of philanthropy⁵⁵.

Concerning governance structures and mechanisms for dialogue and co-operation between civil society and public institutions, the two central collegial consultative bodies are: The National Council for Civil Society (NCCS) and The National Council for European Integration (NCEI). The NCCS is a collegial consultative body to guarantee institutional collaboration between the State and CSOs in support of good governance, participatory democracy, and increased transparency through meaningful participation and involvement of civil society. In line with the Law “For the Establishment and Functioning of the National Council for Civil Society”⁵⁶, the Council consists of 27 members: 13 representatives from Government institutions, 13 representatives from CSOs and one representative from the National Economic Council. In contrast, the NCEI is an advisory body for the European integration process, established by the EU Parliament, aiming to promote and guarantee comprehensive cooperation between political forces, public institutions, and civil society to increase transparency in decision-making on integration issues. According to its internal regulations, at least three members must represent civil society, but based on the 2019 NCEI annual report, the number of CSO representatives has been increased to 18 members⁵⁷.

In Albania, the Civil Society Support Agency was created as a central, budgetary public entity to promote, through financial assistance, the sustainable development of civil society and to create favourable conditions for civic initiatives in the public's interest. In Ukraine, a significant part of the surveyed CSOs (41.5%) have been established over the last five years (before the implementation of the report in 2020-2021); the process of reforms undertaken after 2014 simplified CSOs' registration and operation and brought about the rise of civic activism — the channels of communication with

⁵¹ UNICEF, 2021, p. 12

⁵² [Monitoring Matrix](#)

⁵³ Development Partners Albania for Change 2020, p.43

⁵⁴ ROADMAP, FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY FOR CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY [Drejtimi Strategjik 1: Realizimi i prioriteteve dhe i masave per secilin prioritet \(resourcecentre.al\)](#),

⁵⁵ Development Partners Albania for Change 2020, p.35

⁵⁶ [Legal framework regulating the activity of non for profit sector - National Resource Centre](#)

⁵⁷ Development Partners Albania for Change 2020, p.36

policymakers and the broader public need to be open and functioning. In Albania, for example, a joint council for cooperation between the Government and CSOs has been in place for several years. The Agency manages it for Support of Civil Society Organisations. It was established to give recommendations and suggestions to the Council of Ministers and the whole government⁵⁸.

The ETF study in Jordan paints a similar picture regarding the role of CSOs in HCD and participatory governance. Most organisations (80%) carried out activities related to advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors. The second rank was for the activities related to the advocacy for adult people, strengthening informal learning for young people, delivering non-formal learning to adult people, and delivering non-formal learning to young people, with a percentage reaching 73%. (See Annex 2) Less than half of the organisations (47%) carried out activities related to facilitating employment, creation and/or use of intelligent information. Two-thirds of the organisations are advocating for young people. One-third of the organisations (33%) carry out activities related to enhancing self-employment.

The ETF study shows that advocacy, in general, is one of the main activities of CSOs active in HCD. According to the ETF survey results in Jordan, most of the CSOs (80%) carried out activities related to advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors. Advocacy for adult people focused on strengthening informal learning and delivering non-formal learning reached 73%. Two-thirds of CSOs carry out advocacy on behalf of young people. Nevertheless, the CSO priorities have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 compared to previous years. According to the survey results, only 42% of the organisations participating indicated advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors as a new activity.

Based on the 2019 Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for Jordan⁵⁹, CSOs' advocacy improved in 2019 because they had greater access to government officials and achieved numerous advocacy successes, significantly impacting policies in HCD. Examples of successful advocacy campaigns included public school teachers demanding higher wages. The union ultimately negotiated an agreement with the government to increase public teachers' salaries by 35% to 60% starting in 2020. Mass protests were organised in February 2019, and unemployed young people from cities around the country marched to Amman to demand employment. In response, the Ministry of Labor announced that 3,300 jobs in tourism, industry, construction, health, and agriculture would be available. CSOs also engaged in advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, organised public discussions on inclusive workspaces, and developed a manual for public and private sector employers to encourage the employment of people with disabilities. The Accessible Jordan campaign successfully advocated for accessible buses for people with disabilities⁶⁰. Other CSO campaigns in Jordan were less successful. Some struggled with a lack of coordination and networking with other CSOs, a lack of government cooperation, and a lack of community mobilisation. Others failed to undertake sufficient research before designing and launching campaigns, exhibited poor planning, or could not sustain follow-up efforts⁶¹.

This is a good example of how decision-makers and opinion leaders can be prepared for the next policy window or even pushed into opening one to take action. If advocates push them to do their job well, decision-makers will take the ideas and change the current policy approach in line with that thinking⁶². To conduct effective advocacy, the first essential step involves gaining an in-depth understanding of the context and policy landscape, that is, the objectives of the policymaking process and the people involved⁶³. The most common objective in policy advocacy is to change perspective about a particular issue and ultimately change government practice or programming in a target area. Some CSOs or organised interest groups also advocate for preventing or blocking change. Still, for

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ The USAID Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) annually reports on the strength and overall viability of civil society in the various countries that it covers. In 1997, USAID published the first CSOSI focused on Europe and Eurasia Region.

⁶⁰ USAID a, 2020, p. 6

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Quinn, 2021, p. 27

⁶³ Quinn, 2021, p. 54

clarity and to represent the majority of cases covered, we focus on policy advocacy for improvement and change for the better in HCD.

CSOs' ability to influence or to have a voice in HCD does not happen in a void. It needs to be cultivated, but to do so, governing state actors need to understand the added value of CSOs. In other words, the legal and political environment in which CSOs operate can act as an enabling or disabling factor. In Uzbekistan, for example, the Decree of the President from May 4, 2018⁶⁴, calls for the development of the activities of non-governmental organisations. In 2019, a nationwide movement called "Yuksalish" was established to make the Uzbekistan public aware of and take ownership of ongoing reforms. In Serbia, a strategy was adopted in February 2022 to create a stimulating environment for the development of civil society from 2022 to 2030. This strategy provides the legal and institutional framework necessary for CSOs to act independently and smoothly and be encouraged to participate in reform processes.

The ETF study found that many CSOs engage with HCD and policy processes. They can respond quickly and flexibly to emerging HCD challenges in niche areas. They act as a bridge between the public sector and target communities and are advocates in the driving seat for change. The tools and instruments they use to impact education and employment services are diverse and range from advocacy campaigns to capacity building of their beneficiaries and target groups. They contribute significantly to forging a way forward by bringing their experience, ideas, and diverse perspectives on the challenges facing the societies they serve.

In conclusion, CSOs are vital players in HCD, serving as crucial partners in governance and policy advocacy. They effectively articulate citizens' concerns, bridging the gap while promoting transparency and accountability. The ETF study and examples from Jordan highlight their ability to address challenges and influence policy through diverse approaches like advocacy and capacity building. Despite the complexity of advocacy work, CSOs' collaboration with states remains essential for achieving more democratic, inclusive, and responsive governance systems. As we progress, leveraging this partnership will be key to advancing social cohesion and sustainable development worldwide.

CSOs have a profound practical knowledge of what is happening on the ground. This should be combined with technical expertise in policy-making processes and engagement in policy dialogue. The shortcomings of CSOs' capacity to engage in policy dialogue was a recurrent issue voiced at the ETF's dissemination events dedicated to the outcomes of its survey in spring 2021.

The ETF 2022 survey on the most effective tools CSOs use sheds light on many practices across ETF partner countries. The diversity of good practices in engagement in policy dialogue in HCD is evident in the surveyed CSOs. CSOs' role is either complementary to or collaborative with the government's role; sometimes, policy dialogue is institutionalised, and sometimes, it is ad-hoc. In whatever form, the CSOs' engagement in policy dialogue regarding non-formal learning, informal learning, and employment supports the development of a shared vision about HCD, including targeting particular objectives. Overall, for the surveyed CSOs, this means engaging in a policy process from "within". This is done through participation in formal structures such as consultative working groups, public consultations, and lobbying. In one way or another, CSOs can find different ways to address the policymakers by discussing the HCD policy agenda, contributing to a policy dialogue, or performing based on the established rules of the policy process.

In summary, CSOs play an indispensable role in the public sphere, amplifying citizens' voices and driving initiatives that enhance public participation. They embody the growing demand for transparent and participatory governance, serving as essential public and state intermediaries. While the state is primarily responsible for democratic governance, fostering synergies between states and CSOs is crucial for effectively addressing social challenges. CSOs are instrumental in building more accountable and legitimate states, strengthening social cohesion, and paving the way for more open and resilient democracies.

⁶⁴ No.5430 "On measures to radically increase the role of CSOs in the process of democratic renewal of the country"

The ETF study has underscored the critical importance of citizen participation in policy dialogue. Establishing direct communication channels between policymakers and the public is especially vital in skills development, LLL, and HCD. Enhanced collaboration between CSOs and government policymakers in these domains can yield significant socio-economic benefits. It is imperative for both parties to continue working together to implement policy measures that integrate LLL and HCD into education systems at all levels.

In a labour market where workers must constantly reassess their skills, discard obsolete ones, and acquire new competencies, success depends on a deep understanding of the needs of all stakeholders. Sustained dialogue between CSOs and policymakers is essential to ensure that everyone has access to the skills required to secure meaningful employment. This collaborative approach will not only empower individuals but also contribute to the overall socio-economic progress of society.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Thinking about the future of skills, HCD and LLL, we expect that much-needed economic growth will probably occur in innovation-driven business clusters such as environment and green tech, health and welfare tech, creativity, digitalisation, and ICT. These areas will develop dynamically based on new and hybrid skills and competencies. In contrast, the traditional approach to education and training may find it challenging to design teaching and learning suitable for all potential learners. Specifically, reaching out to the population groups less inclined to enrol in formal education and training may increase the demand for CSOs' actions in this field.

The role of governments and public authorities remains crucial to take the necessary interventions in HCD forward and, more importantly, to shape policy decisions. With that, the political consensus that has been reached on the transition towards greener and more digital economies and societies is just and inclusive; it lays the groundwork for alliances with CSOs to address the need to leave no one behind in the transformation of the labour markets.

The EU thematic programme for CSOs and local authorities (LAs) was implemented from 2014 to 2020. The programme operated in 118 developing countries and the 27 countries of the European Union, with an allocation of approximately €1.9 billion over the 2014-2020 period. From 2014 to 2020, it implemented over 1 400 individual projects. The programme was built on the strategic engagement of the EU with civil society and local authorities and had three main components: civil society, local authorities, development education, and raising awareness. The programme contributed to the capacity building of CSOs partners in terms of building project and financial management skills. It was weaker in support of CSOs' internal governance, analysis, and advocacy skills and in sector-specific capacity building. The evaluation also points out that in some countries, projects were focused on service delivery and local economic development with the intention that results would create entry points for supporting change in policy and practice at the local government level and among citizens. There were some cases where this took place. However, in many other situations, the shift from services delivered through projects to enhancing policy and policy implementation did not take place at a significant scale.

Overall, the programme improved governance, planning, budgeting, and service delivery in targeted local authorities, but interventions were mainly localised, lacking both sustainability beyond the project duration and pathways for upscaling results. However, in countries where EU delegations invested in structured dialogue with local authorities and their associations, the programme positioned itself strategically and linked the local results and innovations with more sector-wide outreach⁶⁵.

As the European Economic and Social Committee emphasises, "partnering up with CSOs will improve the development, implementation, and monitoring of European, regional and national strategies at all levels and policy areas, especially in human capital development and lifelong learning. CSOs consider themselves as 'critical friends and partners'⁶⁶ that can help governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders to deliver on their pledge to achieve a broad and transformative education in line with the vision set out in the European Skills Agenda⁶⁷, UN Agenda 2030 and its education goal.

The ETF study also provides evidence in this direction. The ETF survey looked at CSOs in six countries: Albania, Serbia, Jordan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, and it has also been extended to Moldova in 2023. It found that many CSOs in these countries focus on non-formal and informal learning and support for employment. They align their work with the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of HCD, especially those related to employment, gender equality, and reducing inequalities. They also prioritise youth and women, offering non-formal skills development and employment support. CSOs commonly provide technical competencies and key skills, with in-presence classrooms seen as more effective learning environments than online classrooms. In other

⁶⁵ European Commission, EC September 2020, p.54

⁶⁶ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/the_future_evolution_of_civil_society_in_the_eu_by_2030.pdf

⁶⁷ "Organisations providing education and training need to deliver relevant skills along the entire lifelong learning continuum."

words, CSOs directly contribute to HCD through a mix of learning programmes and employment support, often providing technical skills and key competencies and fostering self-confidence and motivation to learn.

In response to the increasing importance of individual resilience in the face of rapid technological changes and job uncertainties, CSOs are seen as crucial in identifying and addressing the needs of those outside formal systems. The ETF surveys demonstrate that CSOs can assess and understand the learning needs of individuals outside traditional education and employment channels and convey their perspectives to public authorities and agencies. CSOs also indicated their strengths in providing effective services, fostering inclusive skills development, and innovating in education. CSOs employ various accessible methods to engage with marginalised groups, advocating for their voices to be heard by the decision-makers. Providing a space to CSOs throughout the policy cycle, from planning to review, can help detect citizens' needs, plan HCD policies effectively, and ensure inclusive education and training delivery.

CSOs employ various methods and tools to boost their impact on Lifelong Learning (LLL) and Human Capital Development (HCD). An analysis commissioned by the ETF identified several vital methods, namely detailed learning needs analysis, innovative teaching approaches, holistic personal development support, and linking learning to sustainable employment, all backed by CSOs' quality assurance. Moreover, CSOs enhance their impact in LLL and HCD through advocacy, civil dialogue, and policy influence. These methods demand complex expertise, a long-term vision, and a commitment to success. CSOs actively invest in networking and organisational self-improvement to bolster their actions for both short-term effectiveness and long-term influence. These efforts are crucial for fostering innovation in programmes and services, facilitating mutual learning among CSOs, and ensuring self-assessment and organisational development.

These organisations often work with the government, contributing to shared visions and objectives in non-formal learning, informal learning, and employment support through institutionalised or ad-hoc policy dialogues. While the ETF study didn't assess the quality of policy dialogues and advocacy, it's essential to acknowledge the barriers CSOs face in policy involvement. Their formal consultation and participation in policymaking are often limited, necessitating the establishment and implementation of clear rules and procedures, dedicated financial resources for CSOs, transparency in management and advocacy practices, and greater recognition and acceptance of their recommendations within decision-making processes by public administration.

In summary, there are challenges as well; they include the following. First, the CSOs' scale and organisational setting are not always appropriate for delivering training services due to limited resources, project-based financing, staff volatility, and the use of volunteer work. Second, given that their contribution to HCD is especially relevant in non-formal and informal learning and support to employment, quality standards should be binding for the programs delivered by CSOs. The absence of such a publicly acknowledged quality framework and guideline for their HCD-related services limits further growth. A quality framework and guideline could thus represent a step towards recognising CSOs as reliable actors in the HCD sector and potential interlocutors in policymaking processes. A third challenge can be identified regarding how capacity varies from one CSO to another. Advances in pedagogies, innovation, and performance in attaining long-term beneficial outcomes are some of the CSOs' strengths, but they remain uneven, depending on size, history and area of specialisation.

Overall, ETF findings suggest that CSOs have grown in their role as providers of lifelong learning contributing to HCD. They can implement on-the-ground/grassroots aspects of different projects, showing strong performance, particularly in non-formal and informal learning directly involving adults and young people and strengthening young people's transition to employment. CSOs play a crucial part in expanding education and training beyond traditional systems. They provide valuable development experiences, enriching and broadening HCD efforts in partner countries.

Circumstances are currently suitable for an effective relationship between government and CSOs on learning and employment policy and practice. In light of the New Public Governance paradigm (Moore, etc.), governments and CSOs should identify the purpose and framework of collaboration in the

human capital development sector as common goods on the horizon, but bearing in mind the diverse approaches specific to each country's situation.

Recognising CSOs' role in HCD is an ongoing journey with challenges to overcome. Two aspects come into view: firstly, the question of representation within CSOs, and secondly, the imperative to translate the evidence and expertise accumulated by CSOs into concrete recommendations to steer policy discussions and facilitate the implementation of quality and effective education and training in partner countries.

This thematic paper highlighted the potential and challenges of increasing the interaction between governments and CSOs to allow for a more structured dialogue in HCD and participatory governance. In the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the European Consensus on Development, the importance and benefits of partnership are emphasised, and CSOs are acknowledged as relevant actors in achieving shared goals. However, we need to build effective mechanisms to turn this principle into solutions that can be practised. These mechanisms will not be universal, for the contexts and governance models are diverse, and any new proposal to activate forms of government-CSO dialogue should take the existing conditions as the starting point.

The thematic paper provides a foundational understanding of how CSOs engage in HCD. However, the ETF and the stakeholders in the partner countries should view it as just the beginning of an ongoing and inclusive process. To better support partner countries, the ETF must actively seek feedback and perspectives from CSOs and other stakeholders, leading to the development of more effective, context-specific, and people-centric HCD solutions.

Moreover, the ETF has the opportunity to establish mechanisms for continuous learning and knowledge sharing among CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders. Engaging in workshops, forums, and collaborative platforms can foster vibrant exchanges of ideas and best practices. Through ongoing collaboration with CSOs and stakeholders, the ETF can adapt its strategies to evolving contexts and challenges in partner countries, strengthening HCD initiatives and promoting shared responsibility. Embracing a continuous learning and inclusive approach will fully harness the potential of CSO engagement in HCD. Leveraging the collective wisdom of diverse stakeholders, the ETF can catalyse the development of innovative solutions that address real HCD needs and improve people's lives in partner countries.

To further enhance the contribution of CSOs to the HCD policy process, it is necessary to raise awareness about the added value that CSOs could bring. Inviting them to the table jointly with public authorities and including them in strategic discussions about HCD policies in the countries is an important starting point. This will significantly strengthen the whole-of-society approach to HCD and LLL policy.

One good vehicle for more meaningful engagement of CSOs in HCD could be through National Skills Strategies or national initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee⁶⁸. Engagement with all stakeholders, including CSOs, is vital to building effective skills and strategies that ensure sustained and meaningful contributions. CSOs, being closely connected to communities, offer valuable insights and recommendations for skills development, fostering a shared commitment to policy reform. They also contribute to implementation by providing career guidance, training opportunities, and promoting skills services and policies. In this context, the OECD identified three drivers of CSO engagement: 1) a tradition of collaboration between government and CSOs, 2) the presence of institutions or practices facilitating engagement, such as skills councils, and 3) CSOs advocating for their interests through umbrella organisations akin to employers and labour. This collaboration can be challenging but crucial for effective policy outcomes⁶⁹.

Regarding the Youth Guarantee, the experience of EU Member States since 2013 shows that alliances between state and non-state actors are a condition for success. Both CSOs and social

⁶⁸ [The reinforced Youth Guarantee - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-iss/youth-guarantee/)

⁶⁹ ETF conference report 23 May, Brussels Civil society for lifelong skills development in Europe and partner countries – European Year of Skills

partners have proven crucial to reach out to young people not in education, training or employment (NEETs) to offer them services that integrate information, complementary training, guidance, and transition to job, as well as concrete proposals for internships or suitable quality employment. Extending the Youth Guarantee as an EU flagship initiative in partner countries may stimulate sharing experiences and lessons learned, starting with the Western Balkans region.

Additionally, CSOs' involvement in HCD governance depends on various factors, including a country's commitment to lifelong learning and establishing supportive laws and politics. While CSOs are crucial players in inclusive governance systems, the ETF survey reveals limited regular engagement in policy discussions, with most funding coming from donors. This highlights the need for greater integration of CSOs in policy processes to enhance their impact in HCD.

Through the identification of challenges and opportunities for collaboration with CSOs in policymaking processes and service provision in HCD and LLL, the emphasis is on promoting more effective and inclusive ETF development initiatives in partner countries, and in particular, paying attention to:

Ensure CSOs engagement: CSOs are vital in promoting citizen engagement, advocating for marginalised communities, and providing grassroots insights. By involving them in the HCD –either in service provision or in the policy process, there is a higher likelihood of developing solutions that address the actual needs and aspirations of different target groups in need. As such, ETF could support the partner countries and advocate for CSOs' engagement in HCD. More importantly, the engagement of CSOs in HCD should be viewed as a long-term commitment rather than a one-time effort. In pursuing sustainable development, it is imperative to foster an ongoing partnership and learning process where CSOs, especially those operating at the grassroots level, play a central role in addressing evolving circumstances and emerging challenges.

Be aware of the policy process: CSOs can act as valuable intermediaries between the government and citizens, especially in the sector of HCD and LLL, ensuring that policies and strategies reflect the diverse voices and interests of the people they represent. CSOs also act as mediators, bridging the gap between stakeholders, training providers, and job opportunities. They possess insight into future skills needs, allowing them to support individuals in navigating transitions effectively. Additionally, CSOs contribute to policy implementation by providing valuable on-the-ground experience and insights, informing policy decisions and disseminating European-level initiatives to grassroots levels. This two-way approach aims to engage citizens and stakeholders in developing policies, ultimately enhancing the impact of skills development initiatives⁷⁰. In the specific context of the partner countries, the ETF could explore ways to foster meaningful partnerships between CSOs and government entities to enhance policy formulation and implementation processes, emphasising participatory governance.

Benefit from CSOs' engagement in service provision: Many CSOs operate at the community level and possess a deep understanding of local challenges and resource needs. Partnering with CSOs to deliver services can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of development initiatives by leveraging their established networks and expertise. The strength of CSOs lies in their ability to customise and personalise the learning experience, putting learners at the centre of the process and guiding them along the way. They view skills development as empowering learners, enhancing self-awareness, and fostering positive relationships within communities. However, CSOs face challenges, particularly with specific funding programs that categorise individuals based on a single dimension, overlooking their multifaceted nature.

Engage in Capacity Building: In some cases, CSOs may need support to enhance their capacities to engage effectively in HCD. This is relevant for the service provision provided by CSOs and for promoting their more proactive engagement in the policy process. Developing skill strategies is challenging due to the range of policy domains and stakeholders. Still, governments must engage with civil society alongside other stakeholders in designing strategies, proactively motivate CSOs to high-

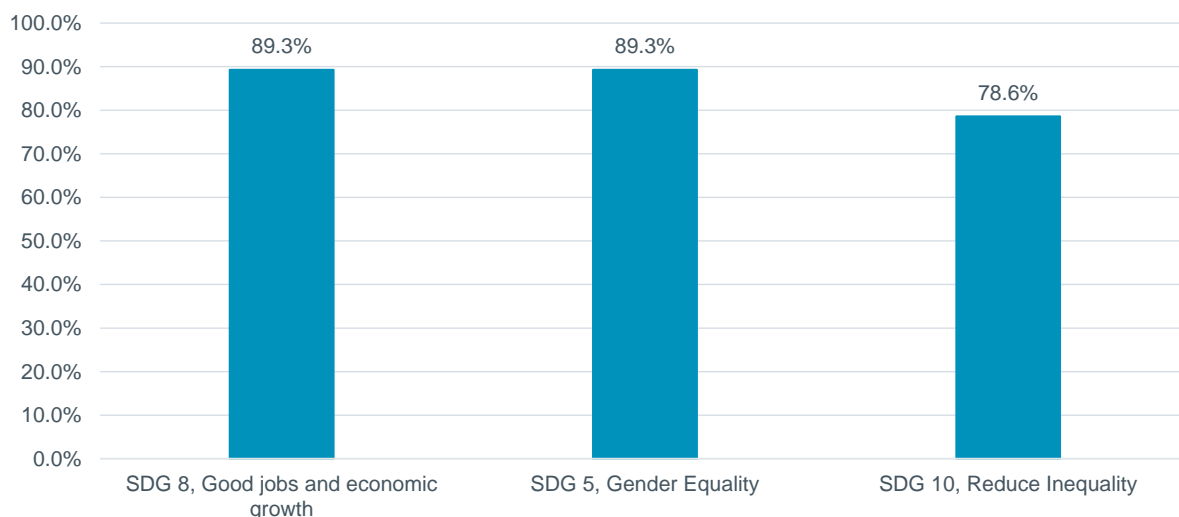
⁷⁰ ETF conference report 23 May 2023, Brussels - Civil society for lifelong skills development in Europe and partner countries – European Year of Skills

quality standard skills delivery, and continue engagement throughout the life of a skills strategy⁷¹. The ETF can consider providing training, technical assistance, or funding opportunities to strengthen CSO capabilities, thereby contributing to a more robust and sustainable partnership between public institutions and CSOs.

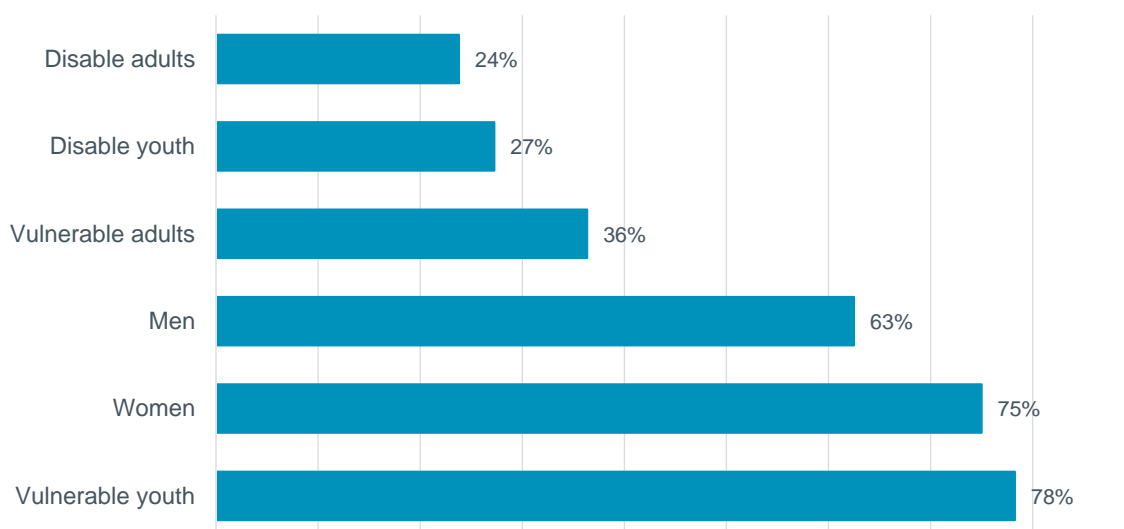
⁷¹ ETF conference report 23 May 2023 Brussels - Civil society for lifelong skills development in Europe and partner countries – European Year of Skills

ANNEX 1: ALBANIA THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



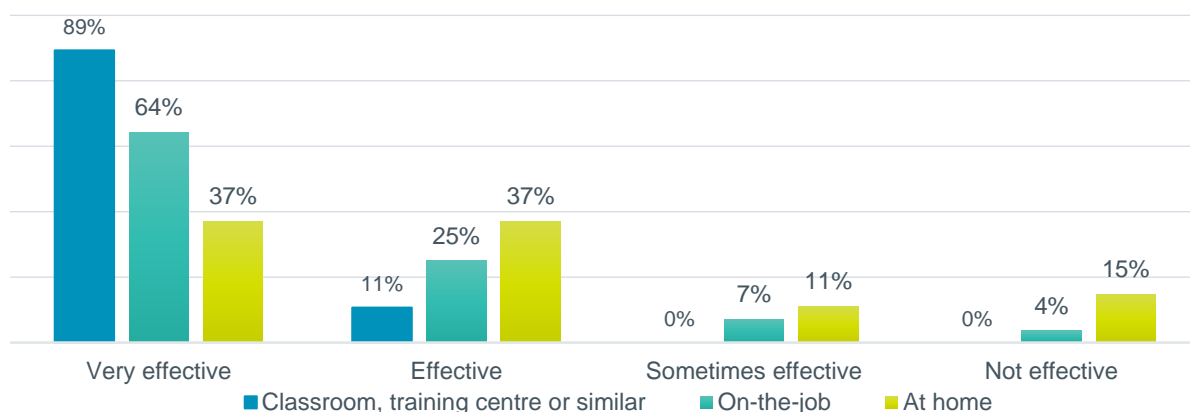
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	75%	21%	4%	0%
II. Key competences	68%	29%	4%	0%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	21%	43%	36%	0%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



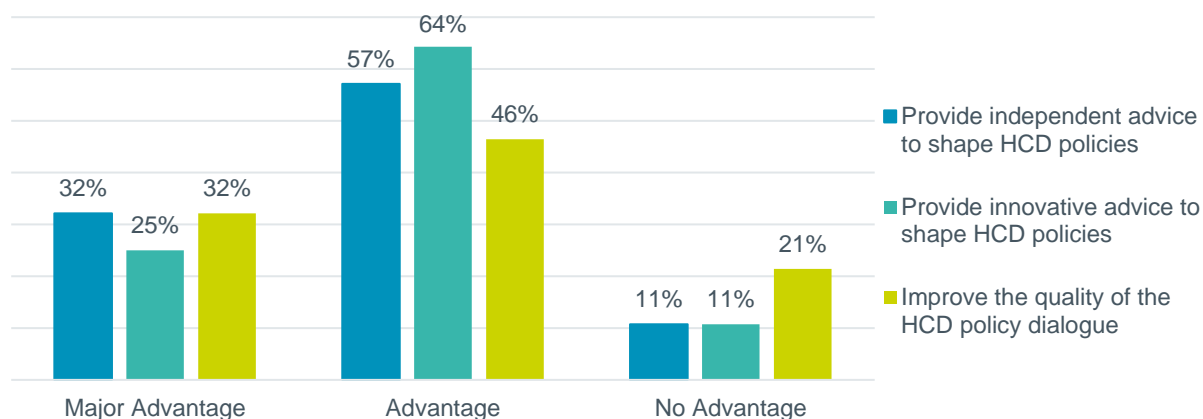
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	25%	75%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	96%	4%

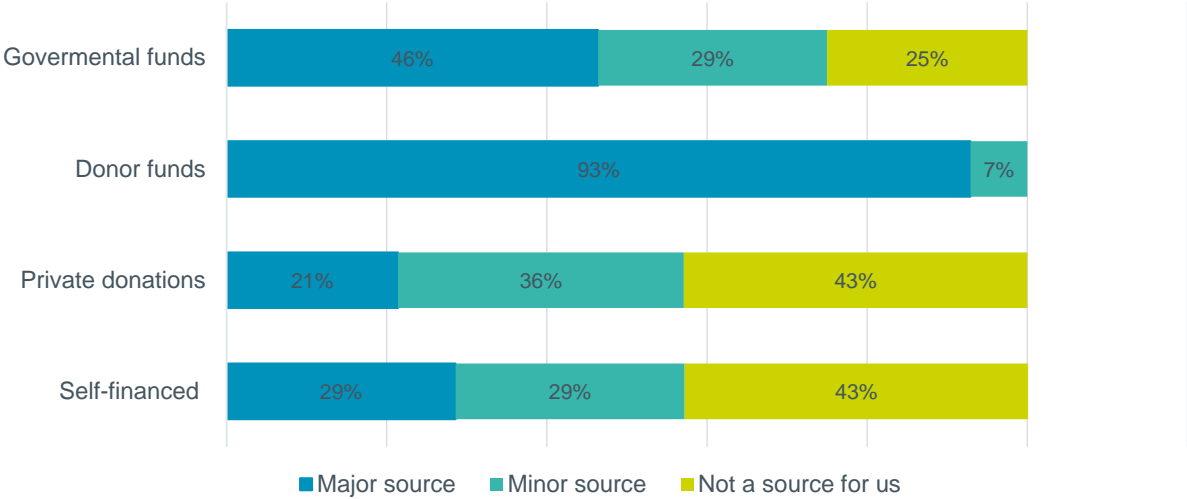
6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	18%	39%	43%	0%

7. The ADVANTAGE of your organisation compared to other (public, private, non-governmental) organisations is:

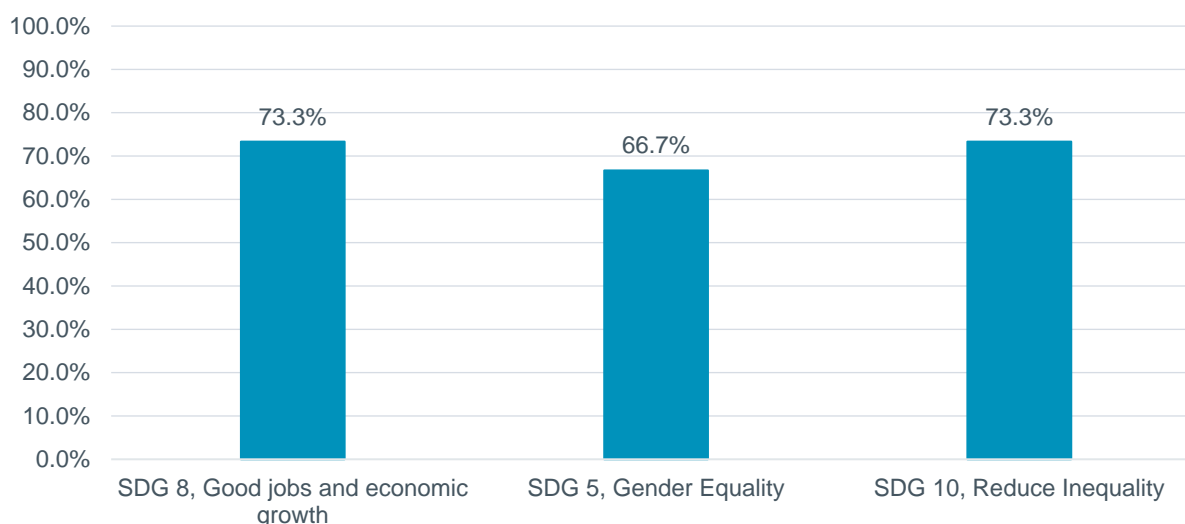


8. How do you FINANCE your activities?

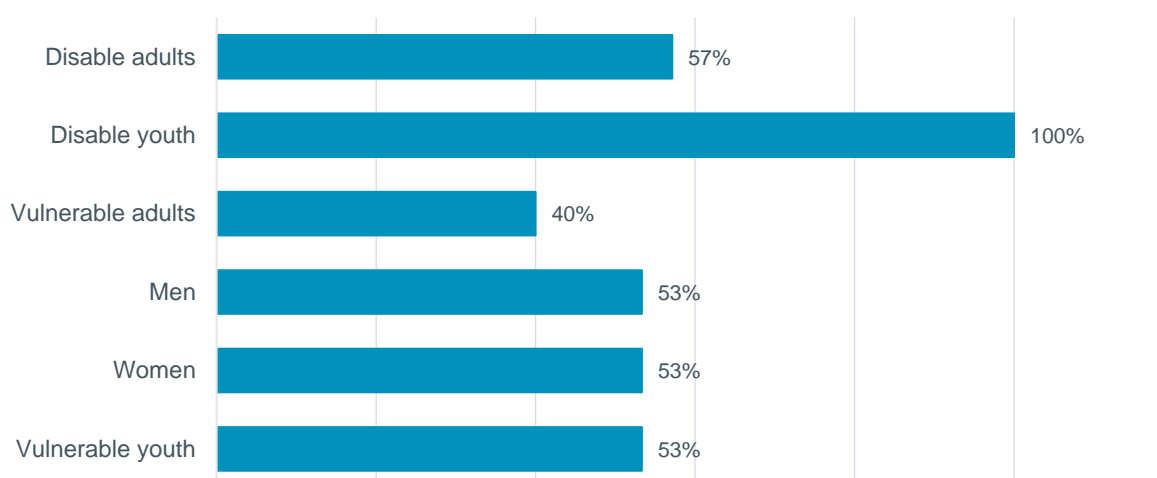


ANNEX 2: JORDAN THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



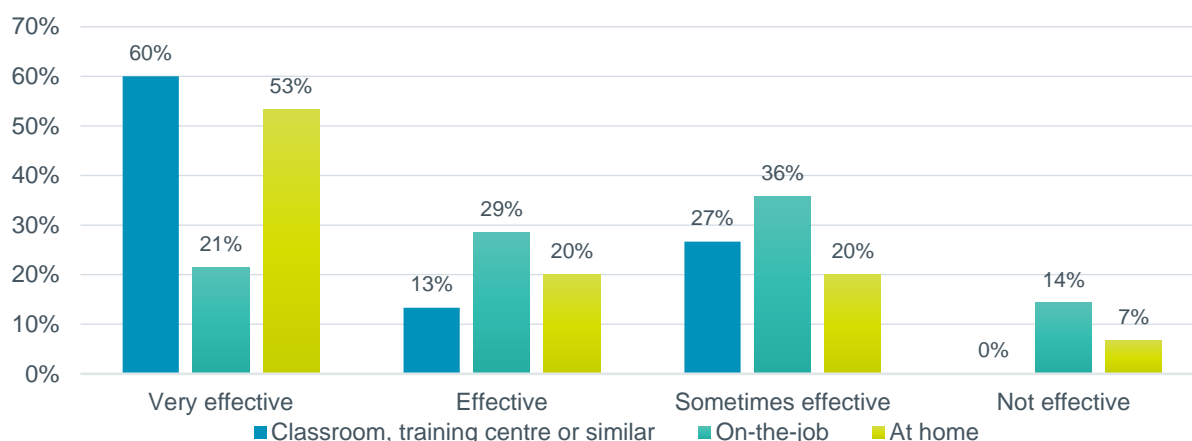
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	67%	33%	0%	0%
II. Key competences	67%	33%	0%	0%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	53%	27%	7%	13%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



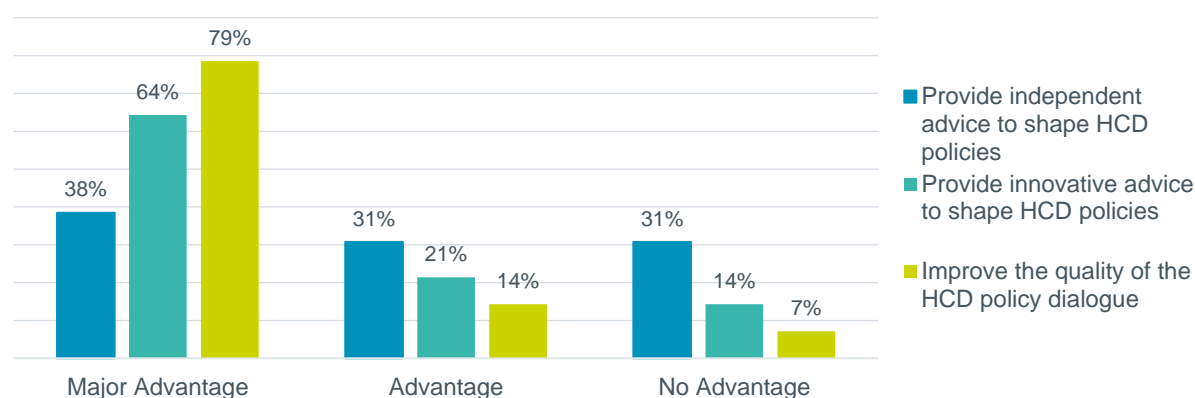
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	47%	53%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	79%	21%

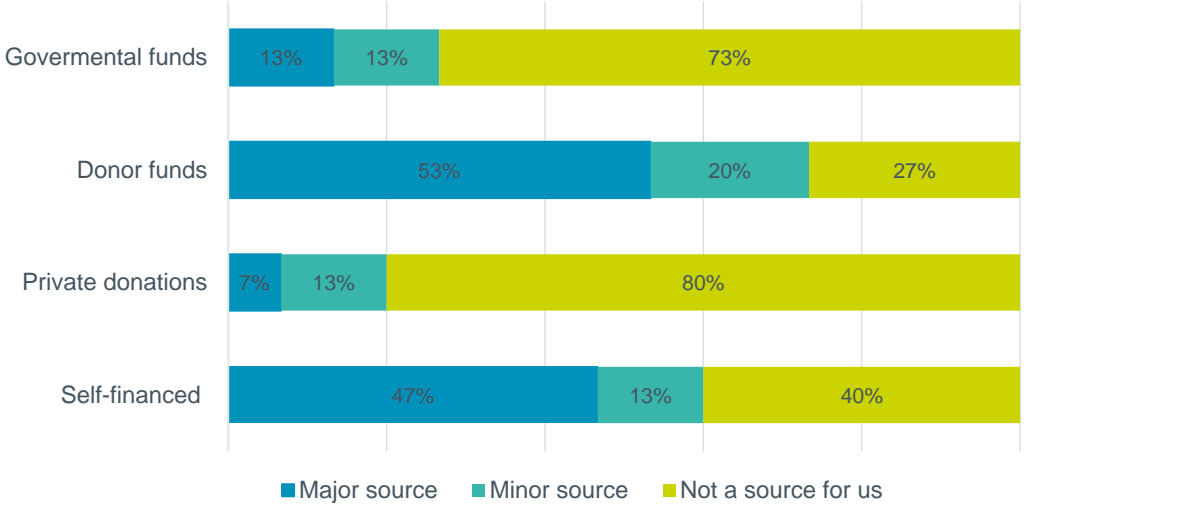
6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	27%	27%	33%	13%

7. The ADVANTAGE of your organisation compared to other (public, private, non-governmental) organisations is:

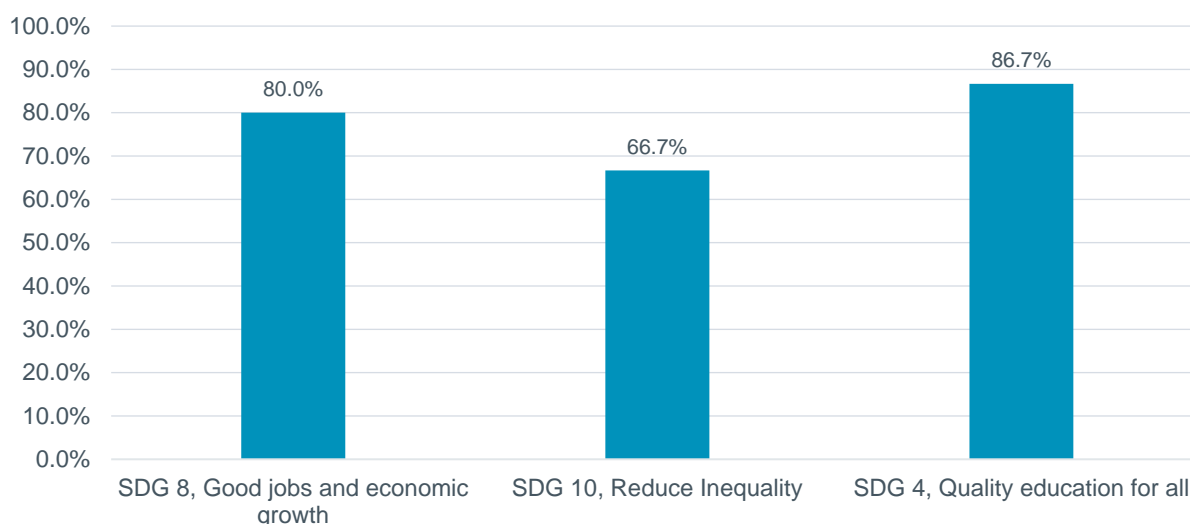


8. How do you FINANCE your activities?

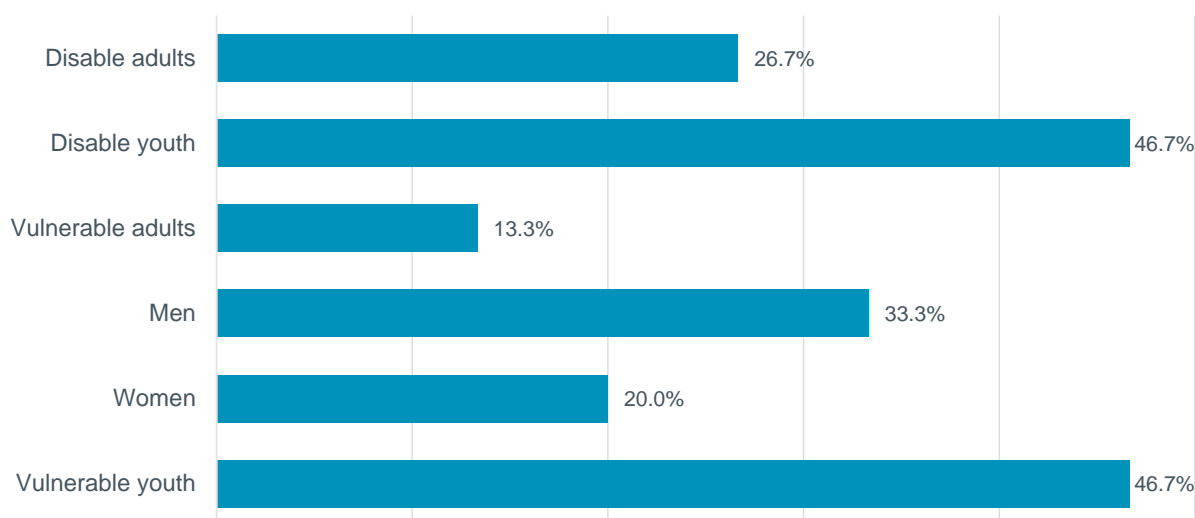


ANNEX 3: SERBIA THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



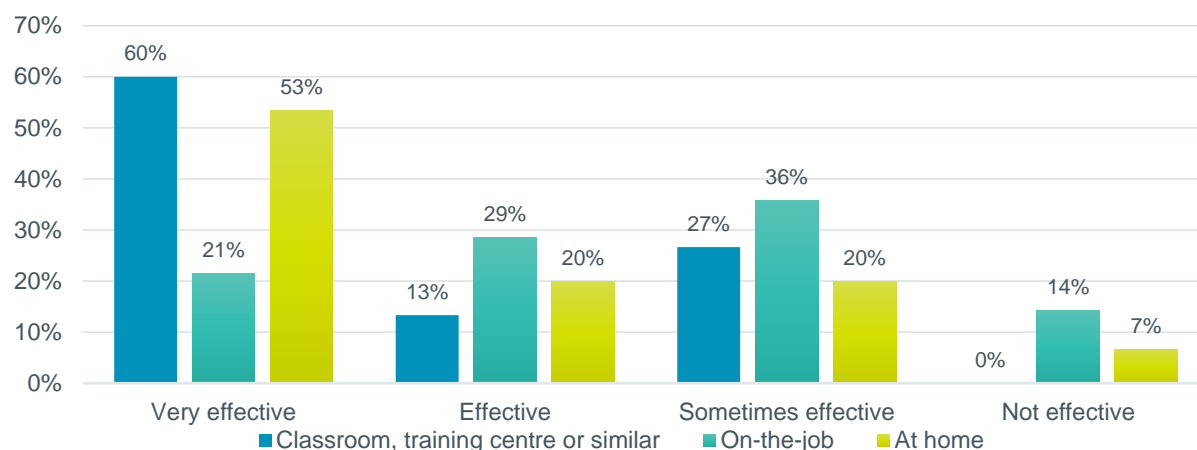
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	27%	27%	27%	20%
II. Key competences	53%	27%	7%	13%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	7%	33%	40%	20%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



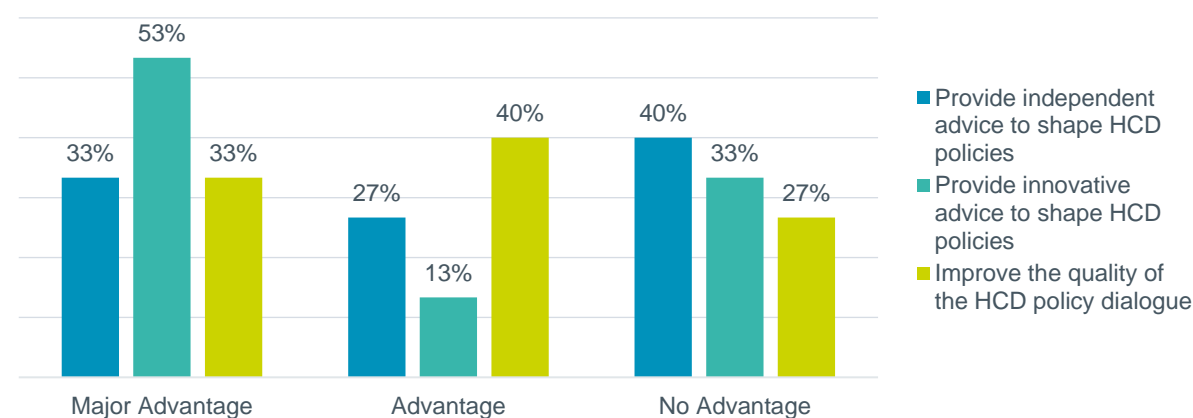
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	7%	93%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	87%	13%

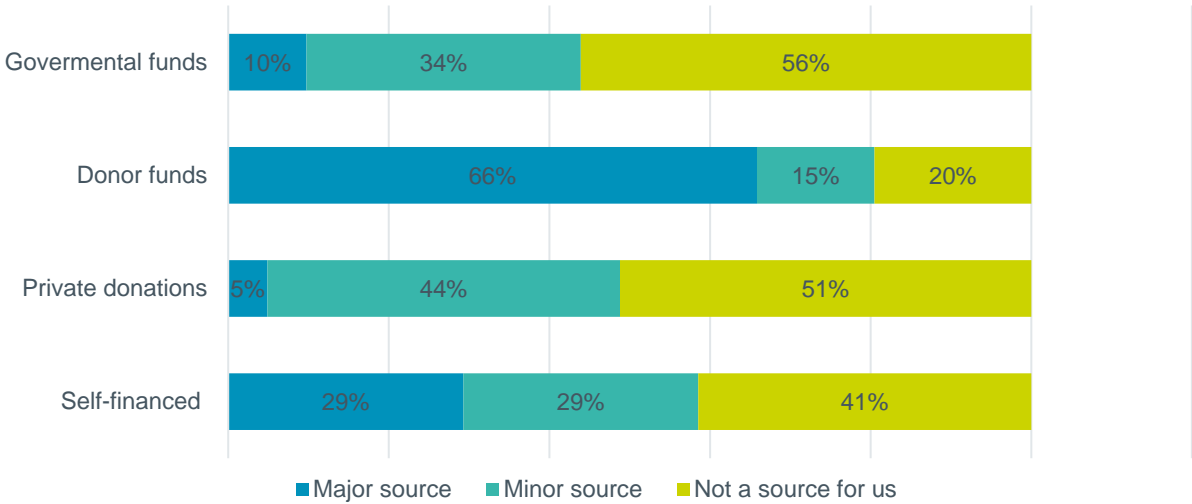
6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	27%	53%	20%	0%

7. The ADVANTAGE of your organisation compared to other (public, private, non-governmental) organisations is:

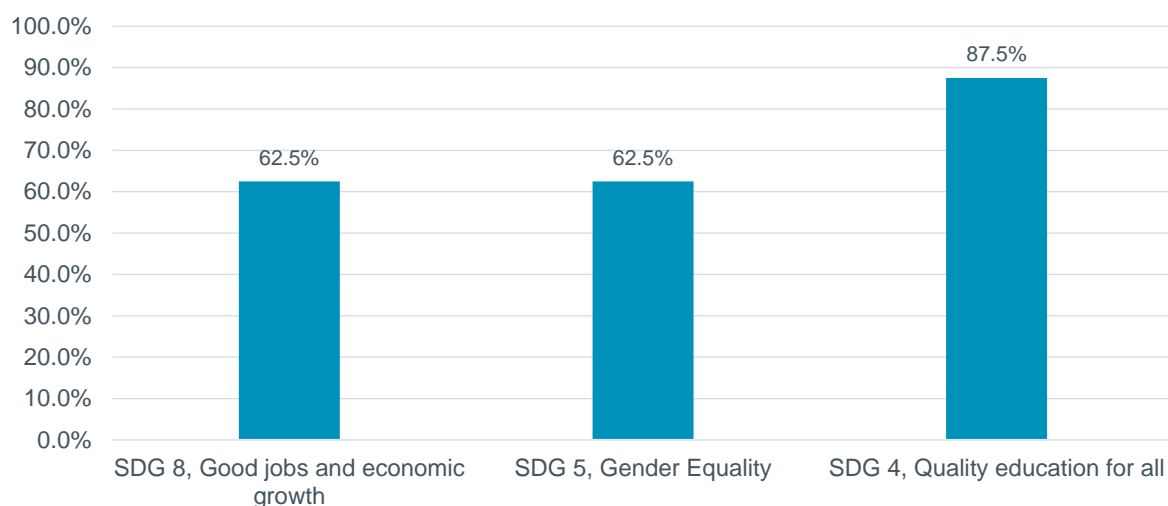


8. How do you FINANCE your activities?

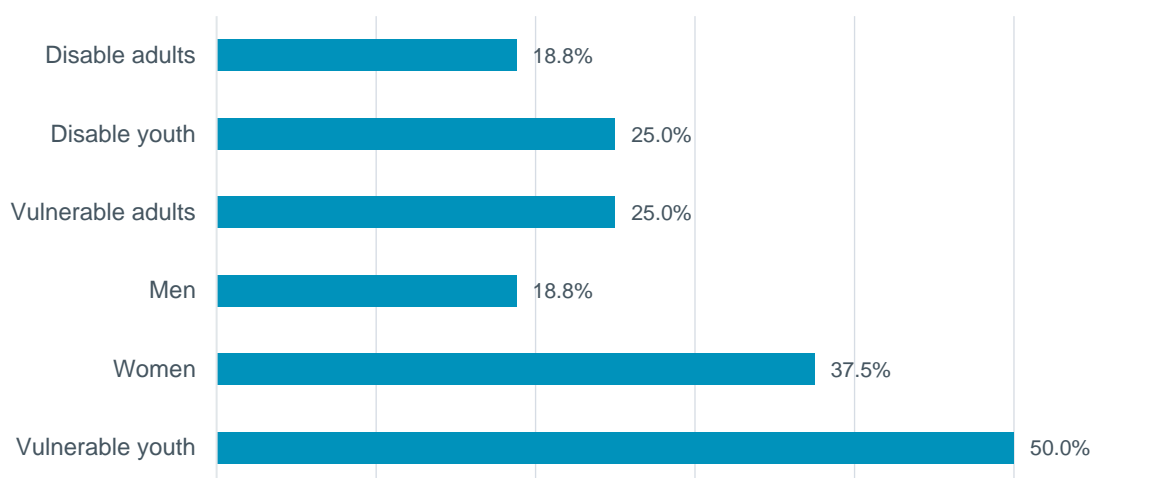


ANNEX 4: TAJIKISTAN THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



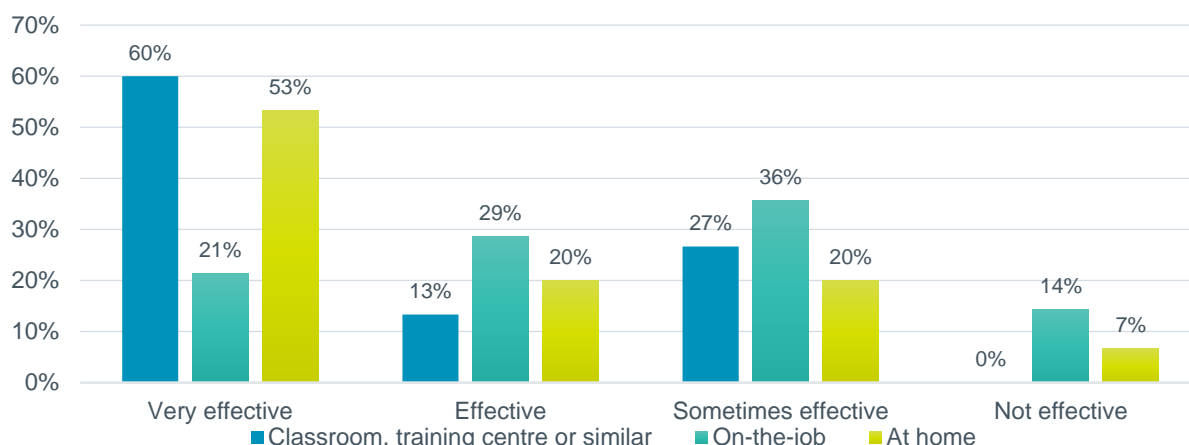
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	38%	31%	13%	6%
II. Key competences	25%	31%	6%	37%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	6%	19%	38%	37%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



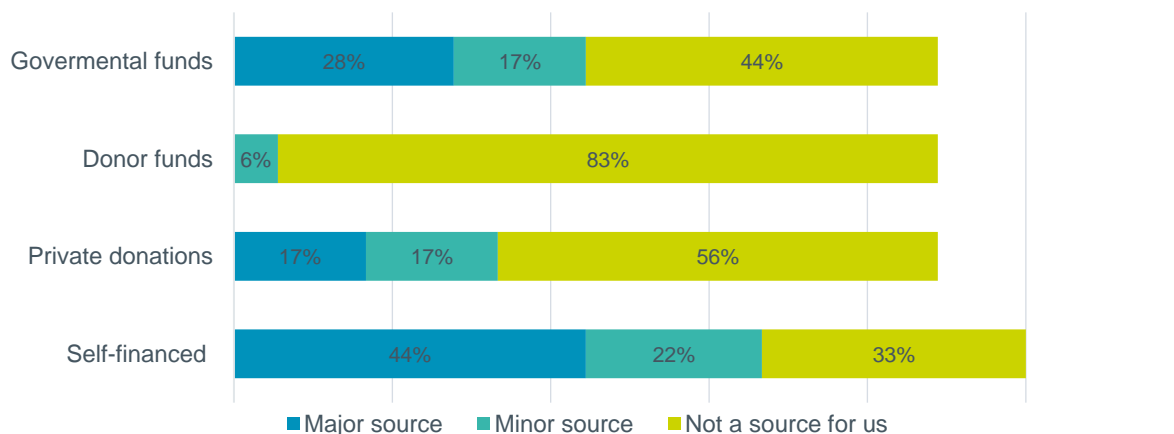
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	50%	50%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	94%	6%

6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

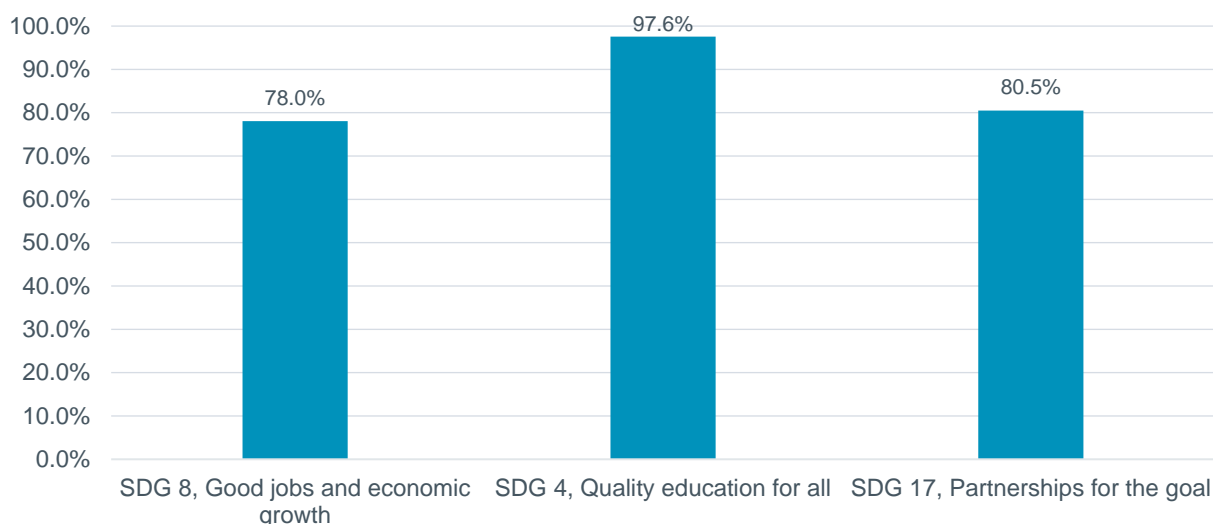
	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	12.5%	50%	31.25%	6.25%

7. How do you FINANCE your activities?

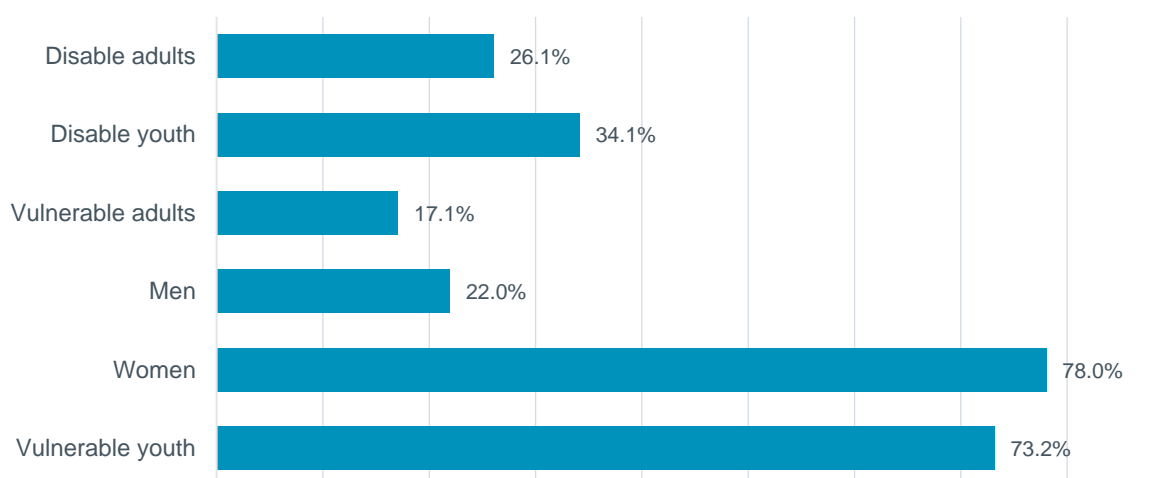


ANNEX 5: UKRAINE THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



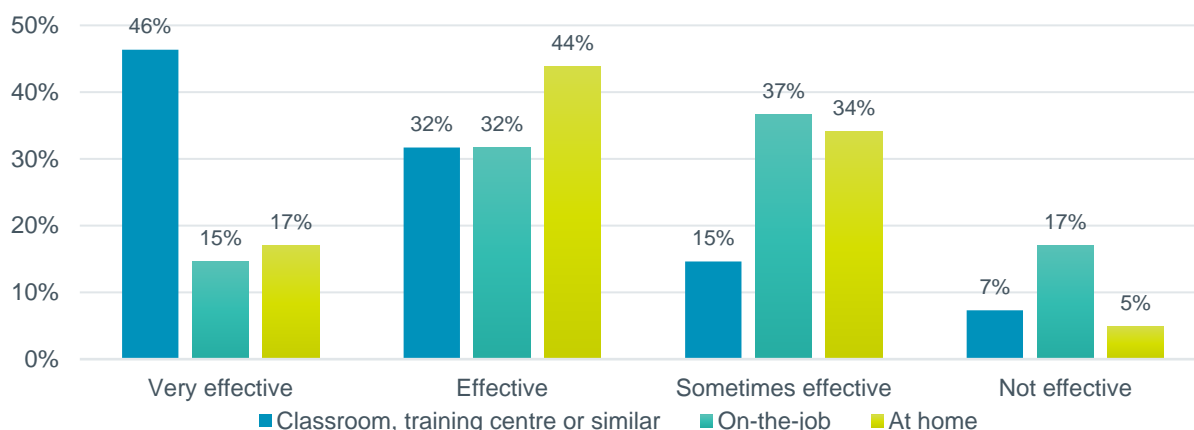
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	24%	24%	32%	20%
II. Key competences	49%	34%	15%	2%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	41%	32%	24%	2%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



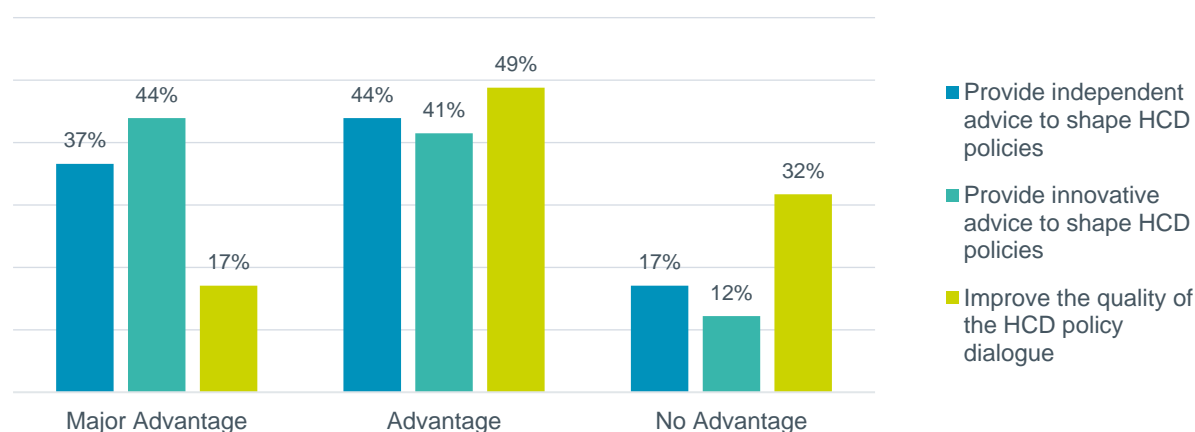
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	29%	71%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	83%	17%

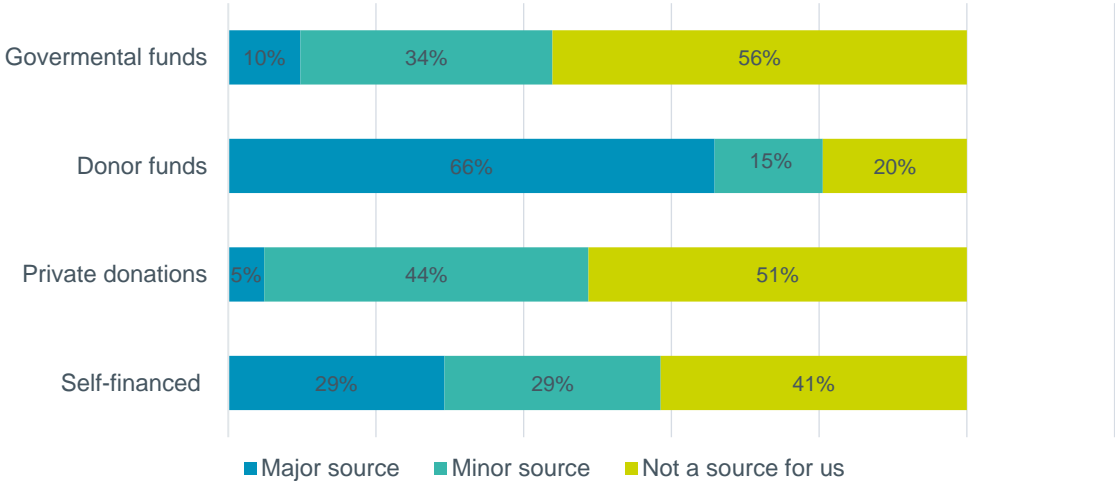
6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	56%	32%	7%	5%

7. The ADVANTAGE of your organisation compared to other (public, private, non-governmental) organisations is:

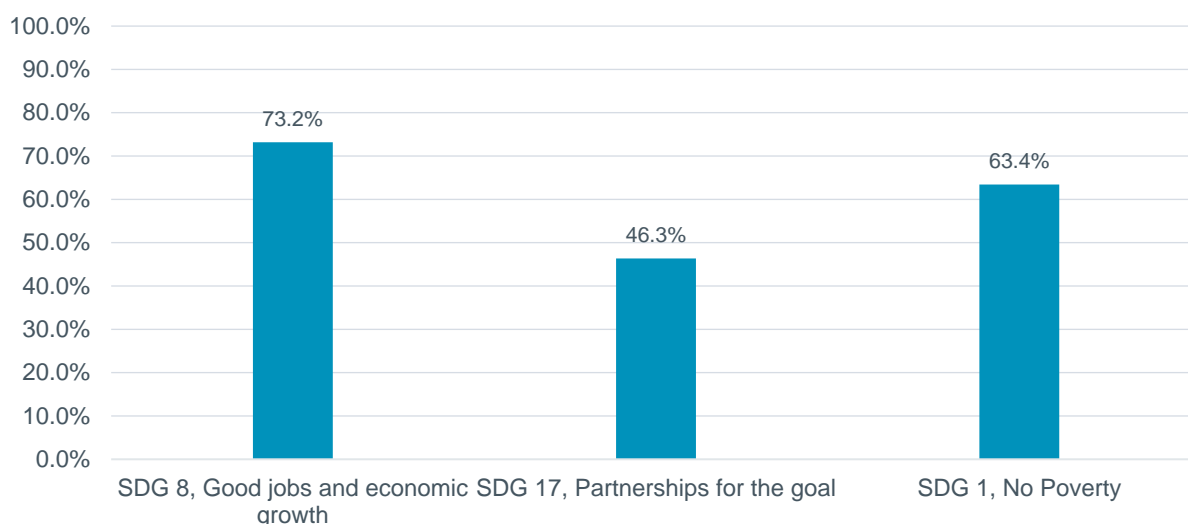


8. How do you FINANCE your activities?

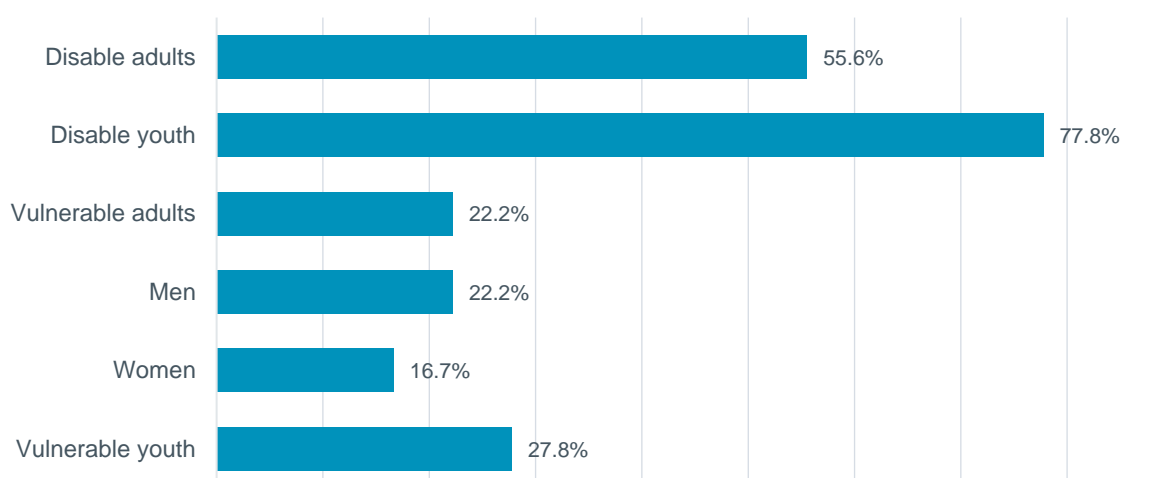


ANNEX 6: UZBEKISTAN THE CSOs ROLE in HCD: SELECTION OF FINDINGS

1. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 is your organisation supporting?



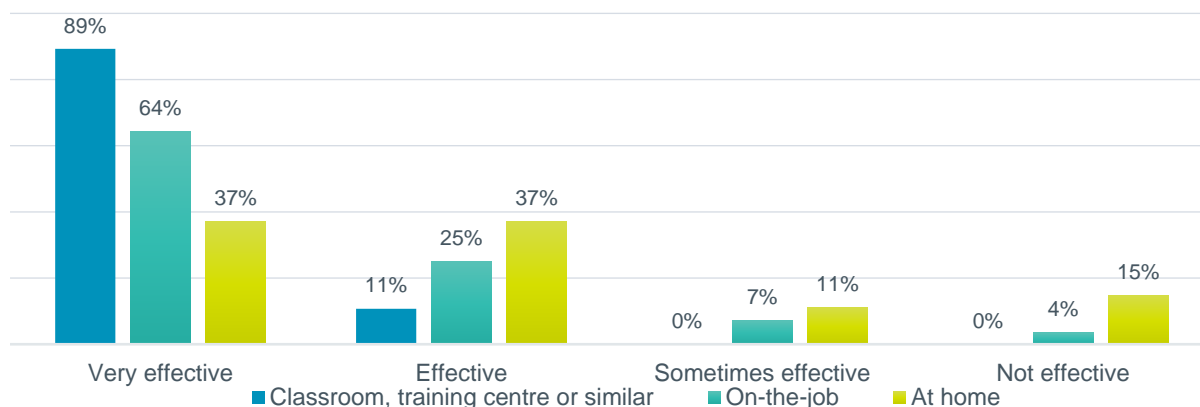
2. The MAIN BENEFICIARIES of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment are:



3. The CONTENT of your organisation's activities related to skills development through non-formal learning and informal learning and services to employment comprises:

	Very often	Often	Not very Often	Never
I. Technical competences	72%	22%	6%	0%
II. Key competences	44%	28%	11%	17%
III. Relationship with authorities and public sector	28%	28%	28%	17%

4. The most effective LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in the field of skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and employment-related services (HCD) are:



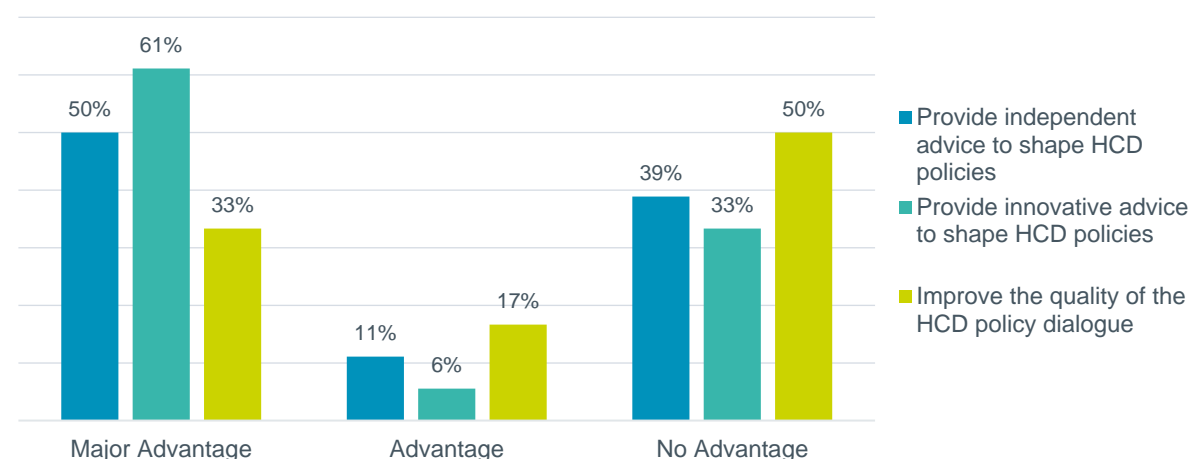
5. The COVID-19 pandemic effects “changes in beneficiary groups and activities in 2020 due to the pandemic.”

	Yes	No
I. During the pandemic, did the beneficiary groups change?	25%	75%
II. DURING the implementation of HCD activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, our organisation has learned short-term lessons.	96%	4%

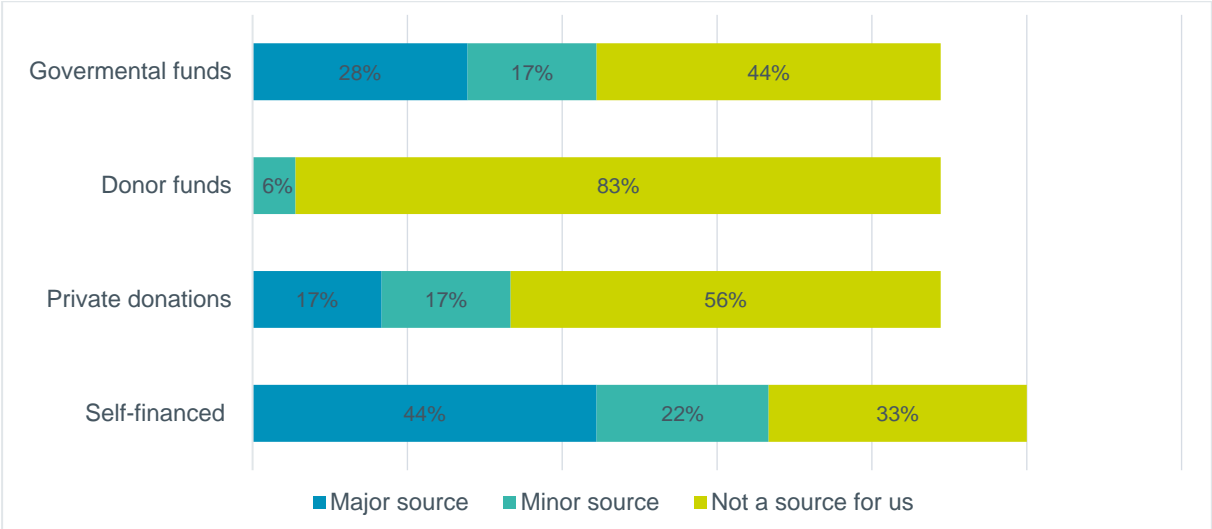
6. Stakeholders & policy dialogue sector: “participation of the organisation in policy dialogue with institutional counterparts, and its contribution to the HCD policy.”

	YES, regularly	YES, occasionally	NO, but I would like to participate in the policy dialogue	NO, my organisation is not interested in the policy dialogue
I. Is your organisation involved in the dialogue regarding skills strategies and policies?	22%	28%	22%	28%

7. The ADVANTAGE of your organisation compared to other (public, private, non-governmental) organisations is:



8. How do you FINANCE your activities?



ACRONYMS

CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSOSI	Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GONGO	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
HCD	Human Capital Development
ILA	Individual learning Accounts
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NCCS	National Council for Civil Society
NCEI	National Council for European Integration
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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