

STRENGTHENING
CIVIL SOCIETY
GLOBALLY



2022 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

RUSSIA

OCTOBER 2023



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For Russia

October 2023

Developed by:

United States Agency for International Development
Bureau of Development, Democracy, and Innovation
Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Center

Acknowledgment: This publication was made possible through support provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-LA-17-00003.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A publication of this type would not be possible without the contributions of many individuals and organizations. We are especially grateful to our implementing partners, who played the critical role of facilitating the expert panel meetings and writing the country reports. We would also like to thank the many CSO representatives and experts, USAID partners, and international donors who participated in the expert panels in each country. Their knowledge, perceptions, ideas, observations, and contributions are the foundation upon which this Index is based.

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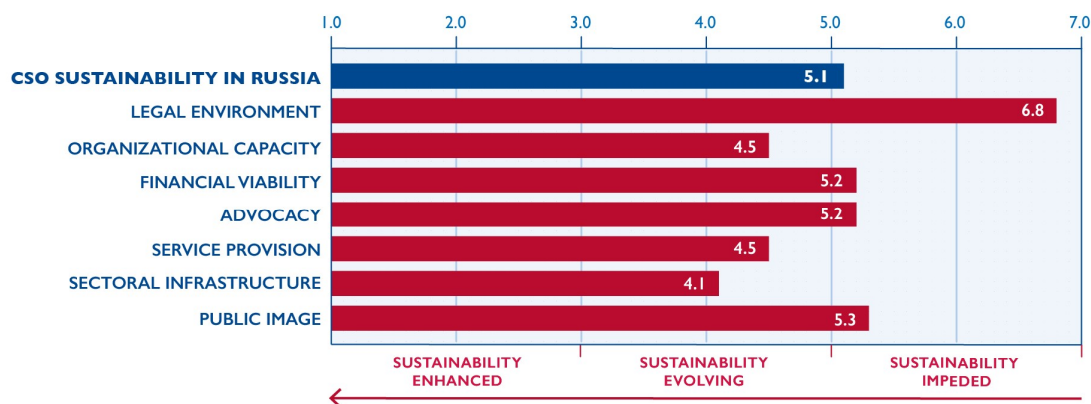
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RUSSIA

Capital: Moscow
Population: 141,698,923
GDP per capita (PPP): \$27,584
Human Development Index: Very High (0.822)
Freedom in the World: Not Free (16/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 5.1



On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine, thereby initiating the largest land war in Europe since World War II. In addition to presenting a serious security challenge to the entire region, this unprovoked aggression resulted in a significant deterioration of the sustainability of Russian civil society.

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, an anti-war movement emerged throughout Russia. In just a few days, an anti-war petition on Change.org gathered over one million signatures—a record for the country. Numerous professional unions and human rights groups issued open anti-war letters calling for the end of the war. Protests denouncing the war were organized in cities around the country.

Against this backdrop, the Russian government swiftly passed a set of repressive measures that dramatically curtailed civil rights and political freedoms, silenced dissenting voices, and sought to neutralize the independent segment of Russian civil society. By the end of 2022, according to OVD-Info, an independent human rights and media group, almost 21,000 people had been detained for protesting the war and other political issues and over 5,500 people had been arrested for administrative offenses. According to the Memorial Political Prisoners Project, the number of political prisoners increased from 430 in 2021 to 516 in 2022. Over a dozen foreign and international CSOs were removed from the registry of legal persons and were therefore forced to leave Russia. The remaining independent media outlets, including *Novaya Gazeta*, *Echo of Moscow*, and *TV Rain*, were forced to shut down. It is estimated that about 900,000 people left Russia in 2022 because of the war, including hundreds of CSO representatives and over 500 journalists.

In March 2022, Russia was expelled from the Council of Europe, an organization that focuses on promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. In September, the Russian government withdrew from the European Convention of Human Rights, ending the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights inside Russia. These developments marked Russia's most prominent drift from the West and democratic development since the Cold War.

In response to the war, a coalition of Western countries imposed harsh economic sanctions on Russia, limiting its ability to acquire capital, technology, and military materiel. Top Russian banks were banned from SWIFT, the global financial telecommunication system, and according to Yale's Chief Executive Leadership Institute, over 1,000 Western private companies withdrew from Russia. The World Bank reported that the gross domestic product (GDP) in Russia contracted by 2.1 percent in 2022—less than originally predicted—and civil society lost access to most of its foreign funding.

Since the Russian government first adopted its reactionary course in the early 2010s, civil society in the country has been steadily deteriorating. Over the past decade, the sector has fragmented into what can notionally be described as three segments: independent, rights-based CSOs; apolitical, socially-oriented non-profits; and loyal, quasi-government, "patriotic" CSOs. The government tends to repress the first segment, use the services of the

second, and support the third. In 2022, following the outbreak of the war, independent activities that challenged the government were no longer tolerated at all.

The official 2022 report issued by Russia’s Public Chamber, a consultative civil society body whose members are approved by the president, claims that a “patriotic consensus” emerged among CSOs, including “a high level of public consent” on government policies. This statement reflects the one-sided, pro-government position adopted by the Chamber and disregards the more complex situation in the sector, particularly harsh repression of independent, rights-focused CSOs.

Overall CSO sustainability deteriorated significantly in 2022, with notable declines in all dimensions of sustainability. New repressive laws and toughening of existing ones further constrained the sector’s legal environment. Organizational capacity diminished as mass emigration led to staffing cuts, while the flight of international businesses and sanctions caused technological disruptions and foreign funding cuts, which affected financial viability. Advocacy opportunities and service provision narrowed, especially for independent CSOs, due to the government’s prioritization of war-related activities. Sectoral infrastructure suffered as the availability of support services declined. The Russian government’s increased stigmatization of foreign-funded CSOs had a negative effect on the entire sector’s public image.

Despite the unprecedented circumstances and difficulties, independent Russian civil society showed remarkable resilience and agility. Hundreds of CSO activists and many independent CSOs relocated to other countries and resumed operations serving in-country beneficiaries. Some in-country CSOs managed to adapt and meet the growing demand for humanitarian assistance. Russian CSOs also proved they can do more work with fewer resources, partially offsetting the deterioration’s effects.

According to the Russian Ministry of Justice, there were around 210,000 nonprofit organizations registered in Russia in 2022, including about 46,000 socially-oriented nonprofits. However, only a fraction of these were active. Many exist just on paper, and some are set up to implement one-off projects or as fronts for corrupt schemes.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 6.8

The legal environment governing CSOs deteriorated in 2022 for the tenth consecutive year, declining sharply with the introduction of many repressive laws that explicitly target independent, rights-focused CSOs.

In March 2022, new federal laws introduced de facto military censorship in Russia by establishing criminal and administrative liability for spreading “knowingly false” information about Russia’s armed forces, discrediting the army, public calls to impose sanctions on Russia, and discrediting the Russian authorities.¹ Under the new laws, use of the term “war” in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is forbidden, and independent media can be penalized if they refer to the conflict as anything but a “special military operation.” The Russian government aggressively used these laws to harass and silence activists.

According to a database maintained by OVD-Info, 20,467 people were detained in 2022 for political reasons—during street protests and in their aftermath, for online posts, and for opinions expressed in personal conversations. The vast majority of detentions (19,478) were related to anti-war activities. Other detentions were connected to environmental protests, public demonstrations in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, pickets against corruption, the new law on LGBTQI+ propaganda, and other issues. The police also actively used



¹ Federal Law No. 32-FZ and Federal Law No. 31-FZ of March 4, 2022; Federal Law No. 63-FZ and Federal Law No. 62-FZ of March 25, 2022 (known collectively as the “law on military censorship”). Undesirables: Following the July 14, 2022, amendments to Article 284.1 of the Criminal Code

disproportionate violence against protesters. By the middle of December, 378 persons in sixty-nine regions had been persecuted for their anti-war stance, fifty-one of whom were convicted, according to OVD-Info. One notable case is that of opposition leader Ilya Yashin, who was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for spreading “fakes” about the Russian army. Alexei Gorinov, a Moscow municipal deputy, was sentenced to six years and eleven months in prison for calling the conflict in Ukraine a “war” and citing a death toll that differed from official sources.

According to the 2012 Law on Foreign Agents, any CSO that intends to receive foreign funding and conduct expansively-defined “political activities” must register as a foreign agent. Foreign agent status imposes obligatory quarterly reporting and requirements to mark all public speech and publications as “created by a foreign agent,” with heavy fines for non-compliance. In July 2022, amendments to the law were adopted that expanded the definition of a foreign agent, established a separate registry of individuals “affiliated with foreign agents,” and introduced the term “foreign influence.” However, no clear definitions of these new terms were provided, allowing for wide interpretation of the law.

Also in 2022, the four separate registries of foreign agents that the Ministry of Justice had previously kept—for non-profit organizations, media, unregistered public associations, and individuals—were merged into a single list of foreign agents. A total of 515 foreign agents were on the consolidated foreign agents registry at the end of 2022.² During the year, 188 new entries were added to the registry, including 167 media entities and 11 CSOs. CSOs newly added to the registry included the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Russia, Women’s Voice, and Environmental Watch of Sakhalin. Foreign agents also received fines 2.7 times more often in 2022 than during the previous year, and the average size of fines increased sixty-fold.

The 2015 Law on Undesirable Organizations bans foreign organizations that pose a threat to the defense or security of the state, public order, or public health from operating in Russia. A total of seventy-two organizations were recognized as undesirable as of the end of 2022, including twenty-two that were newly added to the list during the year (compared to nineteen added in 2021). These include Chatham House and the Woodrow Wilson Center as well as independent investigative projects *Bellingcat* and *Important Stories*. In a criminal case launched under this law, former director of the Open Russia movement Andrei Pivovarov was sentenced to four years in prison.

In July 2022, changes were made to the Criminal Code that expand the definition of state treason and espionage and increase penalties for treason. According to these changes, a Russian citizen can now be found guilty of treason for providing any kind of support to a foreign organization whose activities are directed against the security of Russia. As a result, support for an undesirable organization—even if outside of Russia—can lead to prosecution.

The number of cases and guilty verdicts for treason increased in 2022. About two dozen cases were opened and sixteen guilty verdicts were handed down. In September, Ivan Safronov, former correspondent of the *Kommersant* newspaper, was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison for treason for allegedly sharing state secrets. In April 2023, opposition leader Vladimir Kara-Murza, who had been charged in 2022 with treason, cooperation with undesirable organizations, and spreading “fakes” about the Russian army, was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.

Extremism legislation,³ which the Russian authorities often use to target independent activities, was toughened in 2022 as well. As part of a July 2022 legislative package, criminal liability—punishable by up to four years in prison—was introduced for repeated public demonstration of prohibited symbols, including those of extremist or terrorist organizations. Russian authorities often use articles on extremism to target the political opposition and critical voices as well as to curtail public debate. According to SOVA Center, a nonprofit that conducts research on nationalism and racism in Russia, over 250 people were charged in 2022 in unjustified extremism cases. For instance, a criminal case was initiated against Kirill Martyshev from Tyumen for an anti-war post on his Telegram channel in which he harshly criticized the police. The investigators argued that his message contained a public call

² This number includes those that were subsequently excluded from foreign agent registries.

³ The extremist legislation includes a number of articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: Articles 282 (incitement of hatred), 280 (calls for extremist activity), 280.1 (calls for separatism), 205.2 (calls for and justification of terrorist activities), 354.1 (rehabilitation of Nazi crimes, desecration of symbols of military glory, insulting veterans, etc.) and parts 1 and 2 of the Article 148 (the so-called “insult to the feelings of believers”).

for violent actions against police officers, while SOVA maintained that Martyushev’s “emotional” language did not warrant a criminal case. In 2021, Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF) was recognized as extremist and was forced to shut down. In 2022, twenty-three people were charged in criminal cases on extremism in relation to ACF activities, according to OVD-Info. Under extremist legislation, people who donate to organizations recognized as extremist can become liable for financing extremist activities. In 2022, Andrei Zayakin, co-founder of the Dissernet project that fights plagiarism in Russian science, was charged under this article and placed under house arrest but managed to flee the country. In May 2022, Russia also recognized Meta Platforms Inc. as extremist, banning two of its brands—Facebook and Instagram.

The 2013 law “on propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations,”⁴ which prohibited exposing children to any positive or neutral depiction or discussion of non-heterosexual relations, was also amended in 2022. It now bans “propaganda” targeting both minors and adults, making the work of CSOs focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) issues virtually impossible.

The Russian government also facilitated some minor improvements to the legal environment governing CSOs. It reduced the processing time for registration, lightened administrative penalties for CSOs that are first-time offenders, reduced fines for socially-oriented CSOs,⁵ expanded the range of charitable activities and volunteering,⁶ and allowed CSOs to deposit cash donations through ATMs. In further support of socially-oriented CSOs, the government also loosened the rules for managing endowment funds.⁷

Registration with the Ministry of Justice helps CSOs operate more sustainably, but it is still possible to operate without registration. In 2022, some CSOs opted to work without registration to avoid government scrutiny.

CSOs are allowed to engage in business activities as long as they separately account for this income in their financial statements and use the revenues for their statutory purposes. In practice, it is more prudent for CSOs to register separate commercial entities if they are rendering commercial services.

CSOs continue to be exempt from taxes on grants, donations, the free use of property, and other funds received for charitable purposes. All other income is taxed. Since 2020, businesses using the non-simplified taxation system have been eligible for tax benefits of up to 1 percent of revenue if they donate money or property to socially-oriented CSOs and centralized religious organizations included in the registry administered by the Ministry of Economic Development.

CSOs have access to pro bono legal advice through specialized CSOs, resource centers, and online consultations. The availability of online advice and trainings expanded in 2022, though the quality was uneven.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5

The challenging circumstances of 2022 tested the resilience and organizational capacity of Russian civil society. War-induced uncertainties narrowed CSOs’ strategic planning horizon, mass emigration undermined staffing in the sector, and the withdrawal of Western tech companies and bans imposed by the Russian government on social media platforms stripped CSOs of needed resources and tools. At the same time, the increasingly restrictive legal environment has made it difficult for CSOs to operate, resulting in many CSOs ceasing operations.

Exiled CSOs lost access to much of their in-country constituencies, as logistical barriers and political risks reduced their ability to remotely build relationships with individuals and groups interested in their work. In-country CSOs also faced difficulties in constituency building. For example, the Crew Against Torture, a human rights CSO that investigates torture cases in the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service, has historically relied on state mechanisms to assist victims. After it was recognized as a foreign agent in 2022, the organization lost all access to detention and prison facilities, resulting in a total collapse of its constituency-building efforts.

According to the 2022 NGO Organizational Capacity Study conducted by the Pulse of NGOs project, which is administered by Higher School of Economics (HSE) and the Need Help Foundation, CSOs remaining in the country

⁴ Federal Law No. 478-FZ of December 5, 2022.

⁵ Federal Law No. 290-FZ of July 14, 2022.

⁶ Federal Law No. 340-FZ of July 14, 2022.

⁷ Federal Law No. 279-FZ of July 14, 2022.

were able to improve their organizational structures and internal management processes but continued to prioritize project management over human resources management. Strong dependence on organizational leaders remained a weakness among small CSOs. Only a handful of large CSOs enjoy professional management, whereas smaller and regional CSOs continue to work with “unprofessional heroism,” according to the Potanin Charity Foundation’s report.



Registered organizations formally define their management structures and decision-making systems in their charters. Boards often do not play an active role in governance, although board members in “strong and stable” organizations tend to be more engaged and informed. Smaller organizations, on the other hand, tend to have less sophisticated planning and governance systems.

Disruptions caused by the war negatively affected strategic planning in the sector. Previously, CSOs would plan strategically for the coming year. The pandemic-related uncertainties had already undermined these efforts, and with the outbreak of the war, strategic planning in the sector collapsed. According to a 2022 survey on war-related disruptions conducted by Pulse of NGOs, 46 percent of social and health-care CSOs and 52 percent of

large CSOs were forced to revise their strategies. Independent CSOs that focus on human rights and environmental issues faced the greatest uncertainty, with planning horizons narrowing down to just three to six months. While CSOs’ planning became more short-term and less ambitious, it also became more realistic.

Mobilization and mass emigration affected all segments of the CSO sector. According to the Pulse of NGOs study, one out of every five organizations experienced staff and volunteer cuts. Only 32 percent had sufficient staff capacity to pursue their missions—a significant decrease from 2021. Environmental and human rights CSOs suffered the most, followed by CSOs that focus on charity, volunteering, and local community development. The Pulse of NGOs 2022 survey on war-related disruptions found that while 65 percent of CSOs noted the stability of their teams as a strength, in some cases, ideological differences over the war caused splits as some team members left Russia. The emigration of senior staff caused additional disruptions to the capacity of some CSOs.

In 2022, the mass exodus of tech companies and professionals halted opportunities for further growth in the digital competencies of CSOs and resulted in deterioration of the sector’s technological infrastructure, which particularly affected large CSOs. The Russian government’s blocking of major social media platforms—including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok—further disrupted the work of many CSOs, as did YouTube’s decision to suspend monetization functions for Russian users. The government actively promoted domestic tech products and services, but many CSOs, particularly in the independent segment, raised privacy and security concerns due to the pervasive nature of surveillance and control exercised by the Russian state. Demand for digital security and use of technology in CSOs’ work noticeably increased compared to previous years.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

Financial viability, which was already tenuous, was a growing problem for Russian CSOs in 2022, particularly independent, rights-focused organizations. According to the Pulse of NGOs study, 40 percent of CSOs saw a decline in total funding at the end of 2022, particularly in donations from individuals and commercial companies. Only 31 percent of CSOs had sufficient resources for current operations and 39 percent had reserves for no more than three months.

As a result of the war and Western sanctions, many independent and socially-oriented CSOs lost funding from foreign donors, as well as international businesses that left Russia. Denial of service by international payment systems (including Visa, MasterCard, and Apple Pay), as well as the disconnection of Russian banks from SWIFT fueled further funding cuts. In addition, some CSOs voluntarily stopped accepting foreign funding to avoid the risk of being recognized as a foreign agent.



The effects of these developments were uneven across the sector. While some CSOs lost up to three-quarters of their funding, others managed to preserve and even increase their budgets by reorienting their activities and finding new donors. The Lighthouse Charitable Foundation, a large nonprofit that supports children’s hospices in several Russian regions, reported major financial disruptions due to sanctions. In 2021, the foundation won a \$20,000 grant from PayPal only to discover that it was canceled in 2022. On the other hand, the Vera Hospice Charity Foundation, another large charity, managed to retain support and save all projects, but had to cut development costs and put aside new project ideas.

Overall, government grants remained the most important source of funding for the sector. However, government funding typically benefits GONGOs and other quasi-government structures that do not fall under the definition of CSOs in this report. The Deputy Minister of Economic Development said in a 2023 interview that the amount of government support to the sector was the same in 2022 as in 2021. The ministries that allocated the most funds to CSOs in 2021 included the Ministry of Education (which awarded 47.9 billion rubles to 109 CSOs), the Ministry of Digital Development and Communications (54.8 billion rubles to 280 CSOs), and the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (20.9 billion rubles to 100 CSOs). The government distributed more resources to projects aimed at helping the Russian army and for “patriotic” initiatives during the year.

The Presidential Grants Foundation (PGF) is the single most important source of funding for the sector. According to Pulse of NGOs, half of all of the sector’s funds came from PGF in 2022—a 2 percent increase compared to 2021. Every year, PGF awards billions of rubles in grants to thousands of CSOs—mainly socially-oriented CSOs. In total, PGF provided 4,324 socially significant projects with total funding of 10 billion rubles (approximately \$105 million) in 2022. Another 2 billion rubles (approximately \$21 million) were distributed among the Russian regions to co-finance their own competitions for socially-oriented CSOs. In its first round of grant competition in 2022, PGF awarded its largest grant of 36.8 million rubles (\$406,000) to the charitable organization Doctor Lisa’s Fair Care for a project aimed at helping wounded and critically ill people from the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR, respectively).

At the same time, however, the amount of presidential grants received by environmental and human rights organizations dropped by 27 percent compared to 2021. The majority of CSOs that signed an open letter against the war in Ukraine did not receive presidential grants in 2022. For example, the Vera Foundation, which had received PGF support for five years in a row, did not receive any funding in 2022.

Despite the difficult circumstances, independent CSOs managed to find new opportunities to raise funds during the year. According to Pulse of NGOs, individual donations increased by 27 percent and donations through fundraising platforms increased by 28 percent. Some CSOs managed to increase their funding diversification by working more actively to collect donations through cashback arrangements,⁸ deductions, and points transfers.

According to a survey conducted by the Need Help Foundation and Tiburon Research, only 10 percent of Russians made charitable contributions on a monthly basis in 2022—a decrease compared to 2020-2021— marking the return to pre-pandemic levels. Most often, people donate to help children and orphans, the poor, nursing homes, and stray animals. The share of people donating to help immigrants and refugees increased from 2 percent in 2021 to 6 percent in 2022, while those donating to media outlets increased from 2 percent to 4 percent.

Overall, more than 1.1 billion rubles (\$11.3 million) was donated through Russian charitable crowdfunding platforms in 2022, according to a Culture of Charity Foundation study. The number of people donating through such platforms grew by 27 percent compared to 2021 and amounted to about 600,000. However, the amount of

⁸ Cashbacks are a customer reward program in which a percentage of a purchase is returned to the customer and can then be donated to a charity of their choice.

donations increased only insignificantly after several years of significant growth. In fact, large platforms, such as Need Help, VK Dobro, and Blago.ru saw a decline in overall donations made through their platforms, while donations made through relatively new services continued to grow: donations on the Help application grew by 50 percent, the Tooba service by 43 percent, and the SberVmeste platform by 23 percent.

According to a recent study conducted by Sber Private Banking, Frank RG, and Philin Philgood, corporate donations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) spending account for about 75 percent of all charitable giving in Russia. The same study indicates that while the amount of corporate support did not change much in 2022, funds were redistributed to address urgent issues relevant to the corporate donors' business. Despite this, many large CSOs saw a substantial decrease in recurring corporate donations in 2022—ranging from 10 to 50 percent—not only due to the withdrawal of international businesses from Russia but also due to technical disruptions caused by the suspension of the major payment systems. For example, World Wildlife Fund Russia noted that its corporate fundraising suffered more than private donations, as its core corporate donors were mainly financial and IT companies, as well as manufacturers of consumer goods, most of which were affected by war-related sanctions. The amount of donations environmental and human rights organizations received from commercial organizations fell by 12 percent in 2022 compared to 2021. Yet, some CSOs, such as the Shelter (Nochlezhka) Foundation, which helps homeless people in St. Petersburg, reported a slight increase in corporate donations.

Some CSOs earn revenue through the provision of products or services. In 2022, according to the Pulse of NGOs study, such revenues accounted for a greater percentage of CSOs' overall income compared to the previous year. The share of total income that came from service provision increased from 34 percent to 37 percent for CSOs engaged in social support and medical aid; from 21 percent to 35 percent for organizations focused on environment and human rights defense; from 50 percent to 54 percent for organizations involved in the development of charities and local communities; and from 38 percent to 42 percent for organizations engaged in culture, education, and sports.

A registered CSO is obliged to hire an accountant and publish its annual financial statements on the Ministry of Justice's website. Several types of CSOs, such as foundations with revenues over 3 million rubles (approximately USD 32,000 per year), foreign agents, and foreign non-governmental non-profit organizations are obliged to undergo annual audits.

ADVOCACY: 5.2

The war-related effects on advocacy varied across the CSO sector. CSOs' ability to influence public opinion, access government decision-making processes, and directly influence the legislative process notably decreased. The only exceptions were activities that aligned with the government's priorities, such as war-related patriotic and humanitarian projects and mandated social initiatives. Overall, the government's encroachment on civil society continued, further undermining the sector's independence and ability to advocate.

Advocacy opportunities and CSOs' ability to influence the authorities varied depending on the region and the targeted level of government. CSO advocacy was more successful at the municipal and regional levels and least successful at the federal level. The Pulse of NGOs'

annual study on organizational development reported that the ability to influence federal authorities was out of reach for 54 percent of CSOs. Meanwhile, in the Pulse of NGOs 2022 survey on war-related disruptions, some CSO members noted that relations with state agencies became "tense and anxious" and risks of being recognized as a foreign agent became "colossal for everyone" due to the war and growing repressions. CSOs in more developed regions with more sustainable civil society sectors had better access to authorities. According to the regional ranking of CSOs compiled by Russia's Public Chamber and RAEX ranking agency, the three most



developed regional CSO sectors in 2022 were in Moscow, Vologda region, and Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District. In regions with less developed CSO sectors, CSOs have limited interactions with local authorities.

Public councils—advisory bodies formed on a voluntary basis with members of the public, professional groups, and CSOs to liaise between the public and the federal authorities—continued to operate within various state agencies. According to RAEX agency’s 2022 ranking, public councils were particularly effective in the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Federal Anti-monopoly Service, and Federal Youth Agency, among others. Independent rights-focused CSOs, however, have little to no access to participation in public councils. Moreover, public councils are largely seen as “façades” that accept funds from various interest groups to lobby policymakers and government officials on their behalf, while offering few meaningful opportunities for public participation. Transparency International Russia analyzed the work of fifty Public Councils in 2021 and identified 328 cases signifying a conflict of interest.

According to Pulse of NGOs Study, one of the most common advocacy practices by CSOs involved performing the function of government advisor. For example, CSOs organized joint events with the government, submitted official appeals to the authorities, and participated in expert groups set up by the authorities. However, these types of engagement were limited to issues allowed by the state. Conversely, grassroots advocacy practices were least popular during the year: only 10 percent of CSOs made public statements on social and political issues and only 5 percent participated in protests. Policy advocacy initiatives and efforts to advocate for CSO reform were overshadowed by war and repressive actions.

While civic space was generally restricted during the year, one group of citizens independent of the state—namely war correspondents and military bloggers—was able to find its voice and force the authorities to reckon with it. This group of about 500 people—some of whom have over a million followers on Telegram channels—developed a distinct public voice criticizing the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, and top military officials. Although the group holds pro-war, nationalist views, its criticism of the failing “special military operation” gained public traction. As a result, President Vladimir Putin personally met with a select group of war correspondents in September 2022 in an effort that could be seen as both co-optation and establishment of a back channel with people “on the ground.” This phenomenon remains controversial due to the correspondents’ ideology and their quick integration into the government-controlled public space.

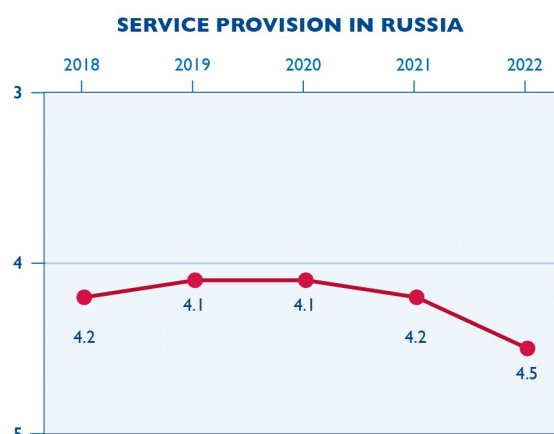
SERVICE PROVISION: 4.5

In 2022, the CSO sector’s ability to provide services, as well as the variety of goods and services provided, declined significantly, as did CSOs’ capacity to generate revenue through service provision. In addition, government appreciation for the services provided by CSOs decreased. The situations of in-country socially-oriented CSOs and exiled independent CSOs diverged: while the former group reported moderate improvements in their ability to address local needs and reach beneficiaries, the latter reported significant disruptions.

The sharpest decline in services was in the organization of public events on social and political issues. In 2022, Golos, an independent vote-monitoring organization, stopped organizing roundtables and other public discussions due to severe restrictions on the freedom of speech, focusing

instead on producing analytical reports and supporting the work of election observers. Similarly, OVD-info, an independent human rights and media group, suspended its educational activities and public events, while expanding the provision of legal assistance to those detained and arrested at anti-war rallies.

In 2022, socially-oriented and pro-government CSOs provided services that addressed the consequences of the war. According to Pulse of NGOs survey, four out of ten in-country CSOs started providing support to those affected by the war: 22 percent began working with refugees, 21 percent with families of servicemen and mobilized, and 17 percent with residents of the occupied Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and



Kherson. As a result, 59 percent of CSOs saw an increase in the number of beneficiaries served, as well as growing demand for targeted assistance. CSOs that focused on narrow groups of beneficiaries, such as immigrants, refugees, homeless persons, or social services and medical care, experienced a pronounced shift in service provision as they were forced to expand the scope of their work to address war-related challenges. However, the expansion of war-related services was often achieved at the expense of other services. For example, Activatica, an online platform for grassroots activism across Russia, saw a decline in the number of environmental projects, with the focus instead shifting to helping refugees from the occupied territories of Ukraine and securing their safe passage across the border from Russia to Europe.

The war-related services provided most often were psychological support, humanitarian aid, food, hygiene products and medicine, and legal assistance. According to Vera Foundation, some CSOs and volunteer associations were able to support specific hospices and palliative care departments in regional hospitals. CSOs such as More Life in Perm and Samara Hospice facilitated the development of full-fledged palliative care wards without “wasting time” interacting with the federal authorities. Yet, due to the lack of official data, CSOs’ ability to understand and assess public needs beyond the immediate demand for humanitarian aid was limited.

Sixteen percent of CSOs collected donations and aid such as protective equipment and medical kits to help the military and frontline workers. However, CSOs that publicly condemned the war, such as the Need Help Foundation, drew the line at delivering help to the military and instead focused on peaceful activities to support their families and other civilian groups.

Employees of independent organizations and exiled CSOs managed to expand their services and launch new projects in response to the new challenges faced by their in-country constituencies. Many aided Russian emigrants, Ukrainian refugees, and conscientious objectors. A former head of Shelter (Nochlezhka) launched the online project Idite Lesom (Go through the woods). The project offered assistance to Russian men seeking to avoid mobilization for the war in Ukraine and relocate abroad safely. In just three days after its launch, Idite Lesom received over a thousand requests for help. Launched by a group of exiled Russian journalists, Help Desk is another new project that offered support to current and future Russian emigrants as well as reports on the war in Ukraine. Over the year, it responded to over 32,000 requests for help or advice.

With new challenges mounting in 2022, cost recovery declined across all segments, with the exception of large and Moscow-based CSOs. In general, CSOs tended to recover costs by applying for government subsidies, which decreased at the regional level as a result of the war. To address this challenge, Moscow authorities pledged to allocate 192 million rubles (\$1.92 million) in subsidies for capital-based CSOs. However, the scope of the subsidies was limited to employee wages, access to head-hunting websites, and the purchase and use of domestic software.

As shown by recent legislation and funding priorities, the government’s recognition of and support for the sector focused on socially-oriented and patriotic CSOs, reflecting the government’s encroachment on civil society and continued efforts at establishing control over its activities by eliminating independent, rights-focused CSOs. Independent CSOs considered acts of state harassment, such as “purges” and being labeled as a foreign agent, as signs that the government recognizes the impact and importance of their work.

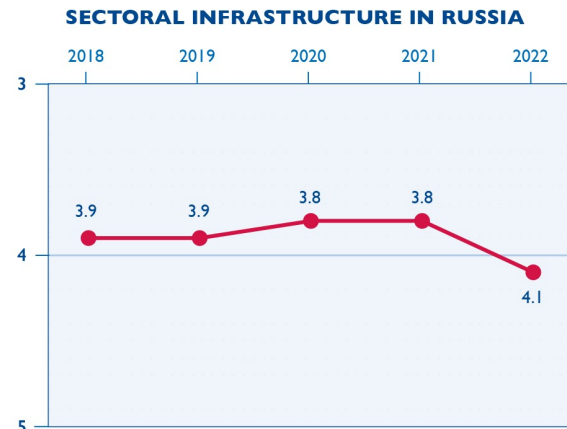
SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.1

The War-related developments damaged the infrastructure supporting the CSO sector, decreasing the availability of support services from intermediary support organizations and resource centers. Independent CSOs partially compensated for war-related disruptions by building new coalitions, while demand for training and education opportunities increased moderately.

Rights-focused CSOs, such as OVD-Info, the Crew Against Torture, and Agora (all designated as foreign agents), had been previously forced to shut down their legal entities in Russia and worked in exile in 2022. Although this decreased the availability of their services, some of these groups managed to conduct limited activities to help CSOs still in the country—legal aid, evacuations, and fundraising—remotely through an underground network of supporters.

Opportunities for mutual assistance also decreased due to war-related disruptions. For example, Free Russia Foundation, an international CSO whose work focuses on democratic development in Russia, helped evacuate most of its in-country partners during the year, while the remaining partners were forced to go underground,

decreasing opportunities for mutual assistance. In a rare exception to this disruption, Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia's oldest human rights organization (which was dissolved in January 2023 by court decision) and Need Help Foundation held a charity auction to help people accused under the war censorship laws. A number of well-known Russian actors, journalists, writers, and cultural figures, who are mostly exiled now, donated their awards to the auction. Outside the country, new partnership opportunities emerged for independent CSOs. In 2022, OVD-Info partnered with Justice for Journalists Foundation, Access Now, and Article 19—nonprofit organizations that focus on freedom of speech—to produce a report on freedom of speech violations in Russia for the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review.



According to the Agency for Social Information, there were notable regional differences in infrastructure. CSOs in more developed regions had better access to individualized support from established resource centers, such as the Public Center for Social Initiatives in the Rostov region. Overall, however, regional CSOs, particularly socially-oriented ones, observed a decrease in infrastructural support with the focus shifting toward targeted, direct assistance. At the same time, they received less support from other NGOs and businesses.

The supply of training noticeably declined in the first half of the year in response to war-related disruptions, although some capacity was restored by CSOs in exile. In response to the overlapping crises within the sector, demand for training, especially on technological savviness and anti-crisis management, grew in 2022. Greenhouse (Teplitsa) of Social Technologies, a CSO that offers educational and training opportunities for the nonprofit sector, saw an uptick in requests for its services in 2022.

Fewer companies and donors in the regions supported CSOs' work systemically through local grants in 2022. However, top charitable foundations provided CSOs with some additional support—but only on issues mandated by the government. For example, the Vladimir Potanin Foundation, the largest private grant-making organization in Russia, awarded anti-crisis grants to fifty-three CSOs across twenty-one regions on top of its regular giving. The Timchenko Charity also launched anti-crisis programs focused on assistance to refugees from Donbass.

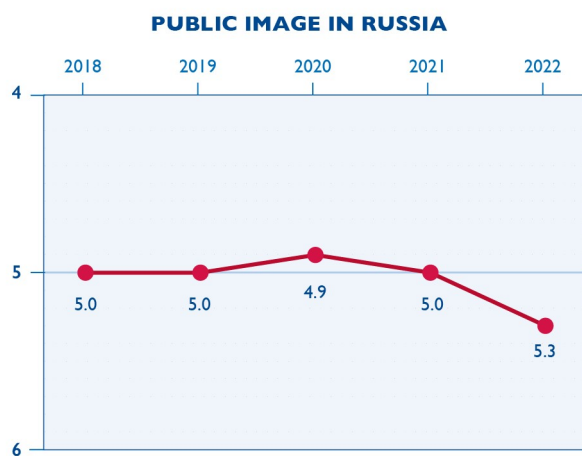
Eighty community foundations in thirty-one regions in Russia use donations from individuals and local businesses, grants, and subsidies to conduct independent grantmaking that supports local initiatives. In St. Petersburg, Dobry Piter (Kind Peterburg) community foundation brought together twenty-five charitable CSOs for a New Year fundraiser to help the young and the elderly, as well as those experiencing hardships.

The main types of partnerships in the sector remained relations with other CSOs (72 percent) and the government (59 percent), according to Pulse of NGOs. Large CSOs are more likely to partner with businesses than smaller ones (64 percent versus 29 percent).

Coalition-building remains one of the least-developed functions of CSOs in Russia, although the COVID-19 pandemic and the war brought some CSOs together. The Care Is Near coalition, which formed in 2020, assists elderly citizens. By the end of 2022, it included about 400 CSOs across sixty-four Russian regions. Following the outbreak of the war, its members expanded their focus to help refugees from the occupied Donbass.

In 2022, in-country CSOs lost the opportunity to interact with international partners. For exiled CSOs, however, the situation was the opposite, as they gained wider access to international partnerships. Many exiled CSOs came to each other's help and pooled resources to operate more efficiently, including through newly established resource centers, such as Reform Spaces, in the key destinations for Russian exiles—Vilnius, Berlin, Tallinn, and Tbilisi. A growing synergy also emerged between exiled CSOs and independent media projects. Some in-country CSOs expressed hope that the current challenges could foster development of cross-sector connections.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 5.3



The public perception of independent CSOs continued to diverge from that of socially-oriented and government-supported organizations. Propaganda outlets and government officials increasingly portray recipients of foreign funding as “traitors.” These efforts had a negative effect on the sector as a whole, including charitable organizations. In 2021, 39 percent of surveyed Russians cited lack of trust as a barrier to their participation in charity; in 2022, this number increased to 56 percent, according to Pulse of NGOs. According to a member of the Presidential Human Rights Council, people continue to be unaware or misinformed about the purpose and significance of CSOs.

In 2022, CSOs reported that media coverage of their activities declined, as it largely fell outside of the war-

driven, government-controlled agenda. This decline was especially disappointing for regional CSOs that already struggled to reach federal media. According to a study by ASI and sociological research organization Zircon, federal media provided less than 25 percent of the sector’s overall media coverage in 2022. Regional organizations also found it more difficult to recruit celebrities and influencers to promote their work. At the same time, exiled independent CSOs found more opportunities to collaborate with exiled independent media.

The introduction of war-time censorship in the government-controlled information environment further obstructed CSOs’ public relations (PR) efforts. While their PR skills were improving, CSOs had little ability to influence the agenda or the public’s and government’s perceptions of the sector during the year. Some CSOs reported that their PR specialists were at increased risk of burnout due to their exposure to the “information frontline.”⁹

PR activities mostly focused on promoting the organization’s brand and posting on social networks, with much less attention paid to strategic and crisis communication. The majority of CSOs do not have strategies for responding to negative information about their work on the internet. As in previous years, small CSOs lacked resources to hire PR professionals.

Self-regulation in the sector worsened in 2022 due to the war-related disruptions and economic challenges during the year. Few CSOs published financial reports, as some CSOs turned to less transparent methods of fundraising. For example, the numerous initiatives that emerged in 2022 to help refugees often provided assistance in an unprofessional manner, for example, collecting donations through personal banking cards without reporting on the use of the funds. Some CSOs complained that their years-long efforts to increase transparency in the sector were significantly offset by such practices. Large CSOs are more likely to have regularly updated websites and publish both annual and financial reports detailing their work.

⁹ The “information frontline” is a metaphor referring to the fact that many PR managers and journalists are overly exposed to war-related news coverage.

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