

## A close-up photograph of a hand dropping a coin into a palm. The hand is positioned at the top left, with the thumb and index finger holding a coin. The coin is being released towards the palm, which is open and filled with several other coins of various denominations. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of light blue and purple.

## Community Session Report: Shaping Budgets Together – How Citizens and CSOs Join the Conversation



## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the April 2025 community session titled **“Shaping Budgets Together – How Citizens and CSOs Join the Conversation”** focusing on the ongoing efforts, challenges, and best practices related to participatory budgeting and public consultations in Western Balkans and Moldova.

The session brought together civil society representatives, government officials, and community leaders to discuss mechanisms for inclusive budget planning, with a particular emphasis on marginalized groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

## Key Highlights

Inclusive participation and outreach remain fundamental challenges addressed during the session. Marginalized groups often face significant barriers to engagement, including physical accessibility issues, lack of transportation, language barriers, and mistrust toward government institutions. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are instrumental in overcoming these barriers due to their trusted relationships within communities and their ability to mobilize diverse groups.

Strategies employed to reach specific populations include using local consultants, sharing information through community networks, digital platforms such as Viber and WhatsApp groups, and placing physical notices in village shops. Additionally, detailed participation lists that record demographic data by gender, age, ethnicity, and disability status are essential tools for monitoring inclusivity and guiding targeted outreach efforts.

The importance of data disaggregation was a key focus, as collecting and analyzing demographic information during consultations enables municipalities and CSOs to identify which groups are underrepresented and to adjust their engagement strategies accordingly. Transparency was highlighted as critical; public consultation reports must clearly state which citizen requests were accepted or rejected and provide reasons, thereby fostering greater trust between the community and government institutions.

The session also emphasized the crucial role of skilled facilitators in ensuring that consultation meetings are welcoming and inclusive. Facilitators must employ specific techniques to encourage participation from all attendees, preventing any single individual or group from dominating the discussion. Moderator training and clear facilitation guidelines are necessary to maintain balanced dialogue and to ensure that marginalized voices are heard and valued.

Participants discussed the current legal and institutional frameworks supporting participatory budgeting. While some municipalities have formally incorporated community forums and participatory budgeting into their regulations, actual implementation varies widely.

Ministries are mandated to allocate portions of their budgets as gender-responsive and to report on these expenditures, yet consistent capacity building and institutional support are needed to ensure these requirements translate into effective action.



The discussion acknowledged particular challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Persons with disabilities, for example, encounter logistical difficulties such as inaccessible venues and transportation, which severely limit their participation.

Concerns were raised about the representation of disabled persons by individuals without disabilities, which undermines the authenticity of their involvement and the understanding of their needs.

Additionally, language and cultural inclusivity for minority groups remain insufficient, with official documents often unavailable in minority languages. The session also noted ongoing advocacy gaps, such as the failure to budget adequately for specialized medical equipment despite prior commitments.

Throughout the session, the pivotal role of civil society was reinforced. CSOs not only raise awareness and mobilize citizens but also advocate for policies that better reflect the needs of diverse populations.

Stronger collaboration between CSOs and government entities enhances policy influence and helps ensure budgeting processes align with community priorities. Recommendations included formalizing a dual approach to public consultations—targeted consultations for specific groups alongside general sessions—simplifying communication materials, utilizing a variety of communication channels, and institutionalizing best practices to sustain impact beyond individual projects. Affirmative measures, such as targeted subsidies for women in sports or agriculture, were also highlighted as effective ways to address existing inequalities.

## Conclusion

The session underscored that although legislative and institutional frameworks for participatory and gender-responsive budgeting exist, consistent practical implementation and genuine inclusivity demand continued dedication, innovative approaches, and cooperative efforts. Strengthening the collaboration among citizens, civil society, and decision-makers remains essential for creating transparent, accountable, and equitable budgeting processes that genuinely reflect the needs of all community members.