



CSO CONSULTATION ON THE THEMATIC CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAMME
1 DECEMBER 2020
13-15H30 CET

Overview

Policy dialogue and consultations with civil society are an important part of the EU approach to International Cooperation and Development. As the new Thematic Programme for Civil Society (CSO Programme) is currently under development, it is crucial to get input and recommendations from our civil society partners and stakeholders. To this purpose, we are hosting a virtual discussion on the key components of the CSO programme on 1 December.

The topic for discussion is the way forward of the Thematic CSO programme 2021-2027, which aims to support CSOs, both in their role as actors of governance, contributing to democratic processes and strengthened domestic accountability in partner countries, and as key development partners, while encouraging CS to participate under other activities under the geographic programmes. The thematic programme is framed by the 2012 Communication and will have a strong focus on the European Commission priority of Governance, Peace and Security, but will also align with the other four core priorities, the Green Deal, Digitalisation, Migration, Jobs and Growth. It will adhere to the NDICI principle of geographisation, where country programmes are the basis for EU action and thematic and regional programmes complement them on a global level. We encourage CSO to play an active role in the country programmes, taking advantage of possibilities that occur.

The new CSO Thematic Programme

A preliminary finding from a recent evaluation of the current CSO Programme is that the programme can be highly relevant given the increasing shrinking space for civil society and tendencies for declining levels of democracy. However, the ambition level of the programme was too high given the scale and nature of the challenges faced by civil society, and would require more attention to the specific political economy in each country as well as stronger coherence and complementarity with other EU and Member State programmes.

The envisaged components of the new CSO Programme exhibit a more focused approach to increase the effectiveness of interventions and address the continuous degradation of civic space and the environment of civil society globally, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. In light of this, the programme will focus on interventions in partner countries, broaden the base of civil society partners, and, concentrate on three transformative priorities i.e. enabling environment, inclusive CSO participation in policy dialogue, and a comprehensive approach to capacity building of local CSO partners. These priorities are consistent with the CSO component of the current CSO Programme.

To achieve this, we propose the following components in the new CSO Programme 2021-2027 at global level. A stronger emphasis on strengthening an enabling environment for civil society, with an EU monitoring and engagement system. This would entail flexible and responsive support in situations of shrinking or opening space for civil society, as well as inform a more systematic and long-term support for a sustainable enabling environment, to be developed in close dialogue with civil society and in complementarity and conjunction with the Human Rights and Democracy Programme, devoted to protect and promote human rights, including fundamental freedoms, and democracy.

Second, we suggest a broader and more comprehensive approach to capacity building for a wider range of civil society actors at both global and country level. The aim is to strengthen CSO actors to participate in an informed way in national dialogue as well as in structural dialogue with the EU on the five priorities of the Commission, which are complex and highly interlinked. In addition, this component will include capacity building to counter inequalities and address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups. To this end, adopting a rights-based and do-no-harm approach and targeting a broader base of civil society actors would be key elements.

Third, the Framework Partnership Agreements are a good instrument for capacity building for CSO global and regional networks and their members. It will be important to strengthen the trickle-down effect of resources and capacities to national and local levels. Fourth, it is suggested that the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), the EU's main forum for dialogue on development policy with civil society and local authorities, should be strengthened to allow for more systematic and flexible consultations with a broad range of civil society representatives. To complement the yearly meetings on global and regional level, we suggest that a digital platform is developed for online consultation to allow for faster and more flexible interaction on a continuous basis.

At least 75 % of the programme will be managed at country level. The country Roadmaps will be strengthened as the key framework for engagement with civil society at country level, covering a structured dialogue and ensuring complementarity between thematic and geographic programmes, as well as EU Member State initiatives.

Finally, we intend to continue promoting the Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) Programme. In response to the preliminary points raised by the evaluation, as well as to better adapt to European Commission priorities, the Programme will be made more strategic and focused, with the objective of empowering EU citizens, and youth in particular, through civil society organisations, to become agents of change and contribute to more inclusive societies, sustainable development and addressing global challenges.

Methodology

Two and half hours are foreseen for the consultation, of which roughly 2 hours will consist of a moderated discussion aiming at capturing as much insight as possible from the participants. To this end, participants will have background information before the event to prepare the debate, which will be preceded by a short presentation on the CSO programme, to be delivered by EU representatives, and a round of clarifying questions on the presentation.

Following the consultation, it will be possible to share written comments until the 10 December using the template. Input and recommendations from the consultation will feed into the programming exercise of the new CSO Programme. We welcome both general comments on the structure of the new programme as well as suggestions on the specific components.

The consultation will be centred around three guiding questions as a framework for discussion:

1. How can we better detect and respond to changes in civic space in partner countries and better engage to strengthen an enabling environment for civil society?
 - a. What short and long-term modalities could be used on country level, regionally and globally?
 - b. What other actors beyond CSOs should be engaged to strengthen and protect civic space?
2. How do we best build capacity in local CSOs to empower civil society, both as an actor of governance and as a development partner?
 - a. How can we increase capacity of CSOs in partner countries to further their participation in policy dialogue and contribution to reducing inequalities?
 - b. Is the FPA framework a good modality to strengthen regional and global networks and the capacity of local members?
3. How can existing EC instruments to engage with civil society be improved?
 - a. How can we develop the PFD platform, including the future digital format, to ensure an inclusive and effective policy dialogue, making sure that civil society is consulted appropriately and that the voices of women, youth, minorities and marginalised groups are heard?
 - b. How can the Roadmaps better create complementarity between thematic and geographic programmes and between EU and Member States initiatives? How can civil society be better mainstreamed in the new cooperation priorities at country level?
 - c. How can we make the DEAR Programme respond to global challenges in a more strategic and focused way in order to increase its impact?

Agenda

13:00-13:10 Welcome and Introduction

- Briefly explaining who is on the call and how we will work
- How this consultation will feed into the current programming exercise

Moderator

13:10-13:20 Introduction to the CSO Programme

EU representative

13:20-13:30 Clarifying questions on the EU programming process and the CSO Programme

Participants

13:30-15:15 Guided discussion and CSOs' recommendations for the CSO Programme

15:15-15:30 Wrap-up and next steps for the collection of written input from the participants

EU representative

Background: The Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities Programme 2014-2020

One of the EU's instruments for support to civil society is the current Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities Programme (CSO-LA Programme). As indicated by its name, the programme also includes support to local authorities, a component that will not be included in this CSO consultation on 1 December. For the entire seven year period, the CSO component had a budget of EUR 1,5 billion, of which 75 % has been managed at delegation level (in partner countries) and 25 % globally at head quarter level. During the period 2014-2019, the programme constituted approximately 21 % of EU funds to civil society partners and is a strategic and important instrument in this regard. It recognises CSOs as legitimate actors of governance and development in their own right. The CSO Programme consists of several components as outlined below.

At delegation level, EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society were established since 2014. Developed jointly between the EU and Member States, 110 roadmaps have been developed to date, serving as country strategies to implement EU commitments on civil society support. Roadmaps are developed based on a mapping of, and dialogue with, civil society nationally, and have been used to facilitate the mainstreaming of civil society in all relevant aspects of policy dialogue and operational support.

Since 2016, the programme has supported international and regional civil society networks and associations of local authorities (ALAs), through 25 Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs). CSO networks are supported as key contributors to policy-making at regional and global levels, through the establishment of long-term joint objectives with the EU and a capacity building grant, with a specific focus of reinforcing the signature organisations' capacities as actors of governance.

Within the CSO Programme, the Commission has also established the Policy Forum for Development (PFD), to foster strategic global and regional dialogue with CSOs and ALAs. Set up in 2013 as a formal space for continuous and open dialogue on EU policy design and implementation, this dialogue platform has provided an opportunity for the Commission to exchange with civil society on policy priorities and receive recommendations on the ways to ensure their implementation.

Since 2018, the CSO Programme has also included a component on philanthropic foundations in an attempt to widen the scope of civil society actors and to leverage additional funds for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In recognition of Foundations as key and active players in development, a first step has been to develop relations with foundations in a more strategic manner, via a structured dialogue, partnerships with networks of foundations and targeted funding.

Another component of the CSO Programme is the Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR), implemented by European CSOs and LAs in EU Member States, and focussing mainly on Pan-European campaigns. DEAR is aimed of enhancing citizens' understanding, sense of responsibility, skills and critical engagement regarding sustainable development and its underlying causes.