



## EU ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN YEMEN (2021-2024)

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Status: Public

Date of approval: See ARES registration date

Update of a previous roadmap? No

Part of the joint strategy? No

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### PART I — BRIEF ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT AND PAST EU ENGAGEMENT

#### A. THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN YEMEN

##### Political and economic considerations

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked 179th out of 189 on the Human Development Index (HDI 0.470), with approximately three quarters of the population affected by poverty in 2020 (women more severely than men). It has faced structural development challenges for decades, but the situation has worsened drastically since the start of the current conflict in 2015, which has already set human development back by more than 20 years (its HDI in 2020 was the same as in 1998)<sup>1</sup>. Yemen has become the scene of the biggest man-made humanitarian crisis in the world. The conflict has caused significant loss of life, massive internal displacement and severe damage to infrastructure, as well as a sharp economic downturn and a loss of livelihoods for large parts of the population. Over 80% of Yemenis are in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. This has left the humanitarian system overstretched, unable to meet all needs and unable to tackle the fundamental economic and governance challenges that contribute to the crisis. Progress on sustainable development has to become the priority.

Yemen suffers from deep political fragmentation and remains geographically and politically divided, primarily between the areas under the authority of the internationally recognised government (IRG) and the large parts of the country controlled by the Houthi *de facto* authorities, which include the capital, Sana'a. The IRG's influence and service delivery capacity is seriously impaired. In this vacuum, local authorities have extended their reach and their ambition to deliver services, but they lack sufficient resources to do so.

In addition to the direct consequences of the armed conflict, the most acute problems currently faced by people in Yemen include severe food insecurity and malnourishment, exposure to preventable diseases (without adequate access to healthcare) and a general lack of basic services, such as clean drinking water and education. In addition, gender inequality is a major obstacle to development progress and poverty reduction (Yemen suffers from the world's highest levels of gender inequality<sup>2</sup>).

The continuation of hostilities, combined with the closure of air and land ports in a country that depends mostly on imports, and where hydrocarbon production and exports accounted for roughly 65% of government revenue before the conflict, has provoked the collapse of the economy. The current economic situation is characterised by sharply rising inflation, the fragmentation of economic institutions, a liquidity crisis, the devaluation and split of the Yemeni *riyal*, the non-payment of civil servants' salaries and soaring unemployment. Food importers are facing major logistical challenges that have increased consumer prices for imported food and non-food items, weakened purchasing power and undermined household income. According to the UN-mandated Group of Eminent Experts, what the Group sees as politically motivated draconian economic measures and the use of hunger as a weapon could amount to war crimes. The economic collapse is a fundamental driver of conflict-related need in what is, to a large extent, an income-related crisis. As a result of the conflict and the economic collapse, about 40% of households have lost their primary source of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library.html>

<sup>2</sup> Gender Inequality Index value of 0.795, ranking it 162nd out of 162 countries in the 2020 index.



income. In addition, most public sector employees (a third of the work force) have not received their monthly pay since October 2016. This has led to over half the civil servants abandoning their post, leaving critical basic services on the verge of collapse. The private sector has also suffered severe losses, compounded by difficulties in accessing liquidity or credit and forcing massive lay-offs and closures.

Civil society actors first emerged in Yemen during the colonial period in the south and the Imamate in the North. The creation of two separate independent states in the 1970s with different political, economic and development systems saw the creation of different types of CSOs in different parts of the country, most of them primarily focusing on literacy, education, culture, local development and environmental issues. The more open political climate and inflow of more diverse donor funding following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990 encouraged the creation of more CSOs. The political uprising as part of the Arab Spring in 2011 opened new spaces for more independent and political forms of civic engagement, including more youth-led CSOs and more diverse areas of focus. While traditionally CSOs had a charitable focus, more CSOs started focusing on broader social and development issues as well as human rights, women's rights, youth initiatives, freedom of expression and democracy. Civil society representatives were included as delegates in the 2014 National Dialogue Conference, indicating that they were seen as credible and legitimate actors able to influence the country's future. The potential for CSOs to play this type of influencing role and actively participate in public life has been severely diminished since the start of the war in 2015. The de-facto political split in the country has created different legal and bureaucratic frameworks for CSO operations, and security issues restrict their ability to operate. As international funding has shifted towards the humanitarian sector, most CSOs currently focus their activities on humanitarian service delivery which is also considered less politically sensitive. At the same time, the conflict period has seen a significant increase in the number of CSOs, many established by or associated with the warring parties.

#### Enabling environment for CSOs in Yemen

The ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) to participate in different domains of public life depends on a set of preconditions commonly referred to as the 'CSO enabling environment', for which different actors carry responsibility. To operate, CSOs (local or international) need a functioning democratic legal and judicial system — giving them the *de jure* and *de facto* right to associate and secure funding, coupled with freedom of expression, access to information and participation in public life. The primary responsibility for ensuring these basic conditions lies with the state. However, in many countries including Yemen, CSOs face restrictions stemming from the legal and policy frameworks within which they work, attempts to discredit or criminalise them, constraints on access to funds, intimidation and even physical harassment, detention and violent attacks. In this context, the international community (including the EU) has a duty to advocate for a space in which CSOs can operate.

The regulatory framework and operating environment for CSOs working on development and humanitarian aid differs across different parts of Yemen. The Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA), as established in 2019, has placed tighter limitations on CSOs' ability to operate in the areas under the *de facto* control of the authorities in Sana'a. These include lengthy and unpredictable approval procedures, visa restrictions, requirements for permissions to carry out visits and monitor projects, detention of staff, etc. Due to these difficulties, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have left or are planning to stop operating in those areas. Even in other parts of the country, the regulatory framework and operating environment tend to vary, depending on the authorities in charge locally at any given time.

In 2020 and 2021, many CSOs have reported that civic space is shrinking in both the north and the south of the country. From consultations with a range of Yemeni CSOs<sup>3</sup>, it seems that the main constraints are:

- **a hostile operating environment** – CSOs report that the operating environment is getting increasingly hostile and insecure, in particular in the north. Office raids, detention and harassment of CSOs and local staff of international NGOs (INGOs) are very frequent;

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<sup>3</sup> The EU Delegation held two rounds of consultations with Yemeni CSOs in Amman: in March 2018, with 20 CSOs (and several INGOs and international organisations); and in November 2019, with 29 INGOs from Aden and Sana'a, 9 INGOs, 4 international organisations and 11 EU Member States.



- **bureaucratic constraints and interference** – legitimate and *de facto* authorities at both national and local level impose heavy administrative procedures for project approvals, and onerous reporting requirements. Multiple layers of public administration have separate permission-granting conditions and these sometimes change at short notice. CSOs experience difficulties in keeping track of and complying with them all, which can lead to delays or failure to secure the necessary approvals. Development actors' (and INGOs') room for manoeuvre is also limited by having implementing partners imposed on them and certain companies being blacklisted;
- **mobility constraints** – this is a particular problem in conflict areas and areas close to the front lines. Numerous checkpoints are in place and the CSOs' work is complicated by the fact that the front lines can move rapidly. Additional restrictions in the north include the so-called *Mahram* decree preventing female staff from travelling unless accompanied by a man;
- **political affiliation and influence** – many CSOs are perceived as having a political rather than a humanitarian or development agenda or are put under pressure to align with certain political actors. CSOs that do not have a clear political affiliation are often perceived as being influenced by international agendas or simply disloyal to one of the parties in the conflict. They may also become the subject of political propaganda and/or fake news;
- **negative perception of CSOs** – CSOs in Yemen are sometimes negatively perceived and may be accused of promoting anti-Islam agendas, in particular where they work with external donors and organisations. Such accusations are sometimes amplified through social media. This contributes to the risk to CSOs and their staff; and
- **challenging financial environment** – local currency and exchange rate fluctuations affect the costs of imported material. CSOs also sometimes face difficulties in accessing cash due to limited possibilities of withdrawing from banks facing liquidity constraints.

#### Civil society capacity

Yemeni CSOs and international NGOs have been and continue to be at the forefront in the delivery of services, even in the most difficult circumstances. They are well placed to identify needs and solutions, thanks to their local knowledge and contacts, institutional memory of what has been tried and worked well (or not) in the past, and ability to identify cost-effective solutions. As compared with international actors, Yemeni CSOs are also more mobile and have greater access to different areas and beneficiaries. Their involvement enhances sustainability, as their continued presence on the ground ensures business continuity, ownership, potential for inclusivity and long-term commitment and accountability *vis-à-vis* the community. Some CSOs also have research and evidence-based advocacy capacity and can tap into the networks of the Yemeni diaspora.

At the same time, many Yemeni CSOs also face multiple capacity-related challenges, including:

- **a lack of funding** – the short-term and output-focused nature of most funding means that CSOs are often unable to meet administrative costs, make future plans, invest in long-term capacities or retain qualified staff;
- **insufficient technical and administrative capacities and skills**, e.g. in strategic planning, context-sensitive lobbying and advocacy, administrative and financial management, monitoring and evaluation, procurement, project design, budget design and monitoring, writing reports, the English language, writing proposals;
- **inadequate internal controls** – this increases the risks of failure to comply with donor requirements, of fraud and of financial mismanagement, which also gives rise to reputational risks;
- **limited qualified human resources**, partly due to the tendency of CSO staff to transfer to INGOs;
- **a lack of networks and coordination structures for joint action or advocacy**, due to limited mobility, increased polarisation, competition for resources, a lack of time and resources for coordination and a lack of secure digital coordination platforms;
- **insufficient ability to withstand pressure and interference**, e.g. from (*de facto*) authorities and armed actors,



which can have a damaging impact on respect for core principles such as impartiality and accountability. Local CSOs are more vulnerable to such pressure due to their local presence and connections in the community;

- **constraints in the ability to deliver to scale**, particularly across different geographical areas;
- **unfamiliarity with donor priorities and procedures**, primarily due to donors' limited presence in Yemen and their resulting lack of interaction with CSOs; and
- **inability to work on and deepen expertise in core mandate** – since the start of the war, the lack of funding and a focus on short-term humanitarian needs and service delivery have reduced CSOs' opportunities to implement activities and maintain or deepen their expertise in their original areas of work, or to expand their activities beyond service deliver to engaging as a governance and policy actor.

Donors also face a number of challenges in their engagement with CSOs in Yemen, including:

- **limited presence** and limited ability to travel to and within Yemen – this makes it difficult for donors to understand needs and constraints on the ground, identify suitable partner organisations, interact with CSOs and monitor/evaluate projects;
- **inadequate staff and capacity to manage multiple and/or small grants** – this often forces donors to work with larger international partners;
- **limited funds**, especially for non-humanitarian and long-term needs not perceived as directly related to the immediate crisis;
- **inflexible funding procedures**, e.g. inability to provide core or long-term funding; and
- **lack of recourse to legal means to recover misused or unused funds** from Yemeni actors, due to the inadequate legal system – this creates a financial risk that makes donors hesitant to fund Yemeni entities.

## B. LESSONS LEARNT FROM PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs

The EU Delegation and EU Member States have supported various CSO-related initiatives in Yemen over the last few years. These include specific CSO capacity development projects, support for grassroots organisations via sub-granting mechanisms and actions promoting CSO involvement in improving basic service provision in coordination and cooperation with local authorities.

Most EU donors work with civil society primarily through intermediary organisations (UN agencies, INGOs or other international actors) rather than directly through Yemeni CSOs. While this enables them to receive funds, Yemeni CSOs often find the relationship to be transactional rather than a true partnership. In consultations, they have expressed a wish to move to direct funding and highlighted the difficulty of accessing donor funds in competition with INGOs. This has also been recommended in external evaluations of EU-funded actions.

Due to the constraints explained above, donors are likely to continue channelling a significant part of their funding through intermediary organisations in the near future. In addition to exploring options for more direct funding, EU donors should focus on fostering a better partnership between the intermediary organisations and Yemeni CSOs, for example by encouraging greater involvement of CSOs in project design and a fair distribution of the budget, including administrative and security-related costs.

Most direct support for Yemeni CSOs goes to a handful of well-established organisations that are well known to donors. The EU should make a greater effort to reach out to a broader and more diverse group of CSOs and non-traditional or non-registered civic space actors, including those based outside the main cities.

Past and ongoing support for civil society has had a limited impact in terms of capacity building of CSOs. In consultations, CSOs report limited know-how transfer from INGOs and a lack of long-term organisational development activities for CSOs. When capacity development initiatives for Yemeni CSOs are organised, there is little follow-up of the outcomes of the training and capacity development activities.



PART II — EU STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN TO ENGAGE WITH CSOs

Definition of ‘civil society organisations’

According to the Commission’s Communication *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with civil society in external relations* (2012), the concept of ‘CSOs’ embraces a wide range of actors with different roles and mandates. Definitions vary over time and across institutions and countries. The EU considers CSOs to include all non-state, not-for-profit, non-partisan and non-violent structures through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, be they political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations. The EU values CSOs’ diversity and specificities; it engages with accountable and transparent CSOs that share its commitment to social progress and to the fundamental values of peace, freedom, equal rights and human dignity.

A. STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs IN YEMEN

The EU has a global commitment to engaging more effectively with CSOs, as outlined in the 2012 Communication. In Yemen, engaging with and supporting civil society are particularly relevant in the light of its weakening due to the armed conflict and economic collapse. As outlined in its strategic guidance document for development cooperation with Yemen (2021-2024), the EU believes in the future of Yemen and seeks to support the foundations for peaceful and inclusive sustainable development in the country. Strengthening the capacities and roles of civil society actors is critical in this respect, as they already play an essential role in humanitarian relief, long-term peace-building and economic development, and will play a similar role in future reconstruction efforts, governance and service provision.

The overall objective of the EU’s engagement with CSOs in Yemen is therefore to promote and support an independent and diverse civil society sector that has the capacity and ability to contribute to its future inclusive, sustainable and peaceful development. This is in line with the EU ‘human rights and democracy’ country strategy for Yemen for 2021-2024, which identifies promoting an independent civil society and enabling civic space as a priority. This roadmap refers primarily to Yemeni CSOs, but some actions will also be relevant to engagement with INGOs.

The EU will pursue its objective through a combination of tools and activities in connection with CSOs, in particular dialogue, funding, capacity-building and advocacy.

OBJECTIVES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	RELATED SECTOR & COMMISSION PRIORITY	RELATED SDG
Support improvement (or help to prevent deterioration) in <b>enabling environment</b> for civil society	Promoting peace and security	SDG 16 SDG 17
Promote increased <b>participation</b> of CSOs (including those representing young people, women and marginalised groups) in domestic and international policy discussions, and in dialogue with EU actors and other donors	Promoting peace and security	SDG 16 SDG 17
Increase CSOs’ <b>capacity and resources</b> to play an effective role as governance and development actors, including as partners of international actors and in cooperation with local authorities	Integrated human and social development Promoting economic stability and growth Promoting peace and security	SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16, 17



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**B. ACTION PLAN**

OBJECTIVES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	ACTIONS (including analysis, policy and political dialogue, operational support)	MEANS (EU programmes/instruments to implement the actions)
<p>Support improvement (or help to prevent deterioration) in enabling environment for civil society</p>	<p><b>Monitor and report</b> on issues relating to civic space.</p> <p>Regular <b>political and policy dialogues</b> on human rights and civic space with Yemeni authorities and stakeholders, at national and local levels. (HRDCS)</p> <p>Advocate with relevant legitimate and <i>de facto</i> authorities for lifting administrative burdens and restrictions on CSOs.</p> <p><b>Public communication</b> on legislation or similar provisions that put undue restrictions on civil society. (HRDCS)</p> <p><b>Rapid engagement</b>, e.g. through statements and demarches to condemn assaults on human rights defenders and other CSO actors. (HRDCS)</p> <p>Promote <b>positive public recognition</b> of the work of civil society, including human rights defenders, through public diplomacy, communications and media campaigns. (HRDCS)</p>	<p>Political dialogue</p> <p>Development cooperation funding</p> <p>Media and communications tools, e.g. social media</p> <p>Political reporting</p>
<p>Promote increased <b>participation</b> of Yemeni CSOs (including those representing young people, women and marginalised groups) in domestic and international policy discussions, and in dialogue with EU actors and other donors</p>	<p>Conduct a <b>mapping exercise</b> of CSOs in Yemen and donor-funded activities supporting CSOs.</p> <p>Increase <b>EU dialogue with a wide range of CSOs</b>, <i>inter alia</i> to ensure that they play a greater role in designing, implementing and monitoring EU-funded activities. Explore possibility of including CSOs in project steering and management committees.</p> <p>Include <b>meetings with CSOs</b> (including those representing women and young people) and, where relevant, joint meetings with local authorities and CSOs in programmes for missions to Yemen.</p> <p><b>Mainstream CSO participation</b> in all areas of development cooperation.</p> <p>Encourage CSOs to reach out to the private sector to identify common goals for the benefit of the community.</p> <p>Where possible, <b>encourage collaborative multi-actor partnerships</b> coordinated with CSOs and national and/or local authorities, with the long-term objective of promoting more inclusive, accountable, effective and sustainable systems at the service of populations.</p> <p>Promote meaningful civil society participation in political processes and decision-making.</p> <p>Reinforce the role and involvement of Yemeni civil society actors, including women's</p>	<p>Political dialogue</p> <p>Development cooperation funding</p> <p>Specific NDICI allocation for measures in favour of civil society</p>



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	<p>groups, in the <b>development and implementation of political agreements</b>, reconciliation and reconstruction processes and related state-building initiatives. (HRDCS)</p>	
<p>Increase Yemeni CSOs' <b>capacity and resources</b> to play an effective role as governance and development actors, including as partners of international actors and in cooperation with local authorities, also promoting the localisation of aid.</p>	<p><b>Increase funding for CSOs</b>, directly through grants, through sub-grants or indirectly by insisting that international partners (UN agencies, INGOs) allocate sufficient funding for CSOs, including administrative costs.</p> <p>Explore opportunities for <b>providing CSOs with long-term core/operational</b> (not just project-specific) <b>funding</b>. This could be done through sub-grants.</p> <p>Provide <b>capacity-building</b> (directly or via intermediary organisations) focusing on technical and administrative capacities, including context-sensitive lobbying and advocacy, and skills in strategic planning, administrative and financial management, monitoring and evaluation, internal control and fraud prevention, procurement, project design, budget design and follow-up, report writing, English language, proposal writing.</p> <p><b>Encourage and facilitate coordination</b>, networking and alliance-building among CSOs.</p> <p>Insist on intermediaries engaging with CSOs as <b>partners</b>, not just implementing organisations or subcontractors. CSOs should be involved in strategic planning and receive capacity-building support and sufficient funding, including for administrative costs.</p>	<p>Development cooperation funding</p> <p>Specific NDICI allocation for measures in favour of civil society</p>



OBJECTIVES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	OUTCOME INDICATORS
Support improvement (or help prevent deterioration) in the <b>enabling environment</b> for civil society	<p>Level of EU monitoring and/or reporting on issues related to civic space.</p> <p>Number of political and policy/related meetings where human rights and civic space issues are raised with Yemeni authorities and stakeholders, at national and local levels, and level of reactivity from Yemeni authorities to these topics.</p> <p>Number of EU public communications on legislation or similar provisions that put undue restrictions on civil society.</p> <p>Number of EU statements and demarches to condemn assaults on Human Rights Defenders and other CSO actors</p>
Promote increased <b>participation</b> of CSOs (including those representing young people, women and marginalised groups) in domestic and international policy discussions, and in dialogue with EU actors and other donors	<p>Number of consultations between EU actors and CSOs, INGOs, women’s organisations and youth organisations</p> <p>Number of occasions where public authorities are addressed by the EU with a view to constructively engage with civil society and level of increased participation stemming from these.</p> <p>Number of EU-supported initiatives where CSOs are targeted not only as service providers but as independent, governance and development actors in their own right.</p> <p>Level of meaningful civil society participation in political processes and decision making stemming from EU-supported initiatives.</p> <p>Number of political agreements, reconciliation and reconstruction processes and related state building initiatives where the role and involvement of Yemeni civil society actors, including women’s groups, have been enhanced, following initiatives funded by the EU.</p>
Increase CSOs’ <b>capacity and resources</b> to play an effective role as governance and development actors, including as partners of international actors and in cooperation with local authorities.	<p>Amount of (direct/indirect) EU funding for Yemeni CSOs (direct/indirect, disaggregated by gender and age-related organisations)</p> <p>Amount of EU funding directly targeting Yemeni CSOs’ capacity development (direct/indirect, disaggregated by gender and age-related organisations)</p> <p>Number of EU grants where Yemeni CSOs are part of consortia, together with INGOs or as sole partner.</p>





## ANNEX 1: PROCESS

How were Member States/EU+ present in the country involved in the drafting of the roadmap?	Several Member States participated in the consultations with CSOs. The priorities of the roadmap were developed jointly in dialogue with Member States and the draft was shared with political and development counsellors before finalisation and approval by heads of mission (HoMs).
What mechanisms are there to ensure the involvement of Member States/EU+ in the implementation and monitoring of the roadmap?	Quarterly stocktaking meetings to monitor implementation of the roadmap. HoMs updated on progress once or twice a year.
What consultations with CSOs were organised? What types of actor were involved? What mechanisms, if any, were used to ensure the inclusiveness of the process?	Consultations were carried out with a wide range of Yemeni CSOs in 2018 and 2020. These involved prior in-country surveys and individual interviews with a wide range of Yemeni CSO actors.
What mechanisms are there for ongoing dialogue with CSOs? What mechanisms, if any, will be used to ensure the inclusiveness of the dialogue?	One broad civil society consultation (virtual or in-person) per year, plus where relevant more specific (thematic and/or geographical) consultations depending on needs.
How is the roadmap integrated/coordinated with the joint programming process?	No joint programming in Yemen to date.
How does the roadmap relate to other country processes, including 'human rights and democracy' country strategies, the gender action plan, etc.?	The roadmap is closely linked to the EU 'human rights and democracy' country strategy (2021-2024), which identifies promoting an independent civil society and enabling civic space as a priority. The roadmap is closely linked to the EU's gender action plan (GAP III) country-level implementation plan, which includes promoting equal participation and leadership as a priority. Supporting the equal participation and leadership of women in CSOs and supporting CSOs working on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment are important components of the roadmap.

## ANNEX 2: REFERENCES AND SOURCES

- *Views from Yemeni CSOs on the state of play of the civil society landscape in Yemen: main issues and challenges* (EU Delegation, 2020);
- [Communication from the Commission 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\*](#);
- [A new path forward: Empowering a leadership role for Yemeni civil society](#) (Sana'a Center, January 2021).
- [The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding in Yemen](#) (CARPO, May 2020)