



EU ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

IN BELIZE FOR THE PERIOD
2023-2026



Introduction

The Roadmap for EU engagement with civil society is an important initiative of the European Union (EU) Delegation aimed at strengthening the EU's partnership with civil society and supporting its efforts. This planning exercise stems from the EU's commitment, established in 2012 with the communication titled "The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations¹."

A Roadmap of engagement with civil society outlines the EU's approach to engaging with civil society in various aspects, including cooperation design and implementation, political dialogue with national authorities, operational support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), integration of CSOs into EU cooperation sectors, and EU external coordination.

Ideally, the Roadmap would be developed through a joint effort with the EU Member States. However, currently in Belize there are no resident diplomatic missions of the EU Member States. The Delegation of the European Union to Jamaica, Belize, The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and The Cayman Islands, based in Kingston is responsible for representation in Belize, along with an EU Technical Support Office (TO) to Belize, based in Belmopan.

Belize does not currently have an EU country roadmap for engagement with civil society organisations. A previous initiative to activate a Roadmap of engagement with civil society was implemented between 2014 and 2017, but there is no ongoing strategy document to refer to at present.

Currently, there is no established sustained structured dialogue between the EU and CSOs in Belize. However, ad hoc bilateral interactions and consultations, take place particularly arising from opportunities for grants within periodic calls for proposals over the past three years and on a regular basis in the framework of several EU funded projects.

The Roadmap was prepared through a consultation process that involved bilateral meetings with representatives of the State of Belize, International Development Partners, Civil society organisations. Also Three regional consultations were conducted in the Northern, Southern, and Central areas (Orange Walk, Punta Gorda and Belize City respectively) with the aim of enhancing the participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from diverse regions. The consultation process was concluded with a workshop to validate the outcomes, counting on the participation of 28 representatives of Civil society, and with the systematisation of the whole process.

The Roadmap of engagement with civil society in Belize has been developed in complementarity with the EU Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Belize (2021-2027)², promoting alignment and coherence between the EU's engagement with civil society and its broader development objectives in the country. Furthermore, it is aligned with the strategic guidelines defined in EU Action plan on Human Rights (HHRR) and Democracy, 2020-2024³. Also, it is coherent with the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024⁴ and with the Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for Belize of the Gender Action Plan III⁵.

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52012DC0492>

2 The MIP is available at https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/file/belize-multi-annual-indicative-programme-2021-2027_en The effort of engagement with CS has several elements of intersection with the MIP 2021-24. A permanent mainstreaming of CS in the activities prioritised in the MIP will be particularly useful in strengthening spaces for advocacy and CS participation in the sectoral areas of intervention of the EU in Belize. The inclusion of elements related to consultation with the CS for future sectoral projects is part of the general strategy of empowerment of the CS foreseen in the Roadmap. It will also strengthen the impacts of the implemented actions, ensuring greater ownership of the results. The generation and dissemination of official data to CS will be part of the due diligence of the projects financed by the EU within the framework of the MIP.

3 EU Action plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 is available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-action-plan-human-rights-and-democracy-0_en The Roadmap will contribute to 4 of the 5 priorities established: *Protecting and empowering individuals* (particularly promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space, reinforcing economic, social, cultural and labour rights, supporting the rule of law, key elements of the enabling environment); *Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies* (promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making); *Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy (strengthening the opportunities for CSOs* (exercising the role of "watchdog" in relation to the respect of Human Rights, and contributing with different visions and proposals to the democratic processes), *Delivering by working together* (facilitating the development of networks and partnership actions between CSOs).

4 The Roadmap contributes directly to the priority "Civil society oversight and accountability functions". In addition, it impacts some objectives set for the other priorities: Strengthen anti-corruption institutions and legal frameworks; Improve public trust in national governance; Improve data collection and evaluation systems.

5 The Roadmap of engagement with CS will intersect elements related to: Women in all their diversity influence decision-making processes on environmental conservation and climate change policies and actors; Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversities, fully enjoy and exercise their equal economic, labour and social rights.

PART I – BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT AND PAST EU ENGAGEMENT

A. THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY: BRIEF UPDATE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Key developments in the CS context (Enabling Environment⁶ for Civil Society)

Regulatory framework

Belize operates as a constitutional parliamentary democracy. The head of State is King Charles III, who is represented by a Governor-General. The current Governor-General is H.E. Dame Froyla Tzalam, of Mayan descent. In the 2020 elections, held after a challenging period of the COVID pandemic, the People's United Party (PUP), which was in opposition at the time, secured a significant victory, winning 26 out of 31 seats. This demonstrated a strong desire for change among the citizens. John Briceño was appointed as the Prime Minister.

In the political system of Belize, the Prime Minister not only leads the executive power but also plays a significant role in the legislative power as the head of the House of Representatives, one of the chambers of the Parliament, with the other being the Senate. The House of Representatives is comprised of 31 elected members, with the current administration including four women.

The Senate consists of 13 senators, along with the President of the Senate, representing the majority party, the opposition party, and four representatives from civil society, including churches, the private sector, trade unions, and NGOs. Presently, there are six women serving as senators. Of the 17 cabinet Ministers only one is a woman.

In May 2023, the Belize National Assembly approved an act known as the Non-profit Organisations (NPO) Act⁷, which has implications for the environment in which Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) operate. This act is part of a broader set of regulations aimed at preventing money laundering in the region, supported by international agencies. The primary objective of the NPO Act is to enhance financial accountability within CSOs.

Under this act, all civil society entities are required to register as non-profit organisations in a registry maintained by the Belize Company and Corporate Affairs Registry (BCCAR) and provide information about their operations. It is important to note that the act has recently been approved and does not yet have accompanying regulations in place. Once the regulations are established and implemented, CSOs will need to comply with the requirements outlined in the NPO Act and provide the necessary information for registration and financial accountability purposes. The implementation of the Non-profit Organisations (NPO) Act has raised concerns among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Belize. Many CSOs feel that the new regulatory framework will impose heavier bureaucratic requirements on them. There is a prevailing sense of confusion and limited understanding among CSOs regarding the details and implications of this new legislation.

CSOs have expressed some concern that the current legislation reflects the existing inequities in Belizean society as a whole. They point out that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with greater financial and human resources will find it easier to comply with the regulations, while smaller organisations will struggle to register or may not even be aware of the requirements. Without the adequate registration it will become impossible for CSOs to open a bank account in their name and operate. CSOs have raised widespread concerns about the technical and financial barriers associated with the registration process, especially for smaller entities, community based organizations, cooperatives, youth groups, etc.

Moreover, CSOs expressed concerns that the current regulation introduces subjective elements that could potentially enable State control over CSOs' activities and documentation. This has raised suspicions among CSOs about the possibility of the new regulations being used as a means of retaliation against organisations that undertake advocacy on sensitive matters or hold critical views towards the government. CSOs are concerned that many grassroots organisations, in particular, may find it impossible to meet the requirements of the Act, thereby limiting their capacity to take action.

6 The enabling environment is one of the key priorities for the EU engagement with civil society, as established in the EU Communication "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations" (2012). <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2012-communication-roots-of-democracy-and-sustainable-development.pdf> It refers to the conditions within which civil society operates: if civil society is an arena, the environment is made up of the forces that shape and influence the size, extent and functioning of that arena. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/defend/civicus-enabling-environment#:~:text=The%20enabling%20environment%20refers%20to,and%20functioning%20of%20that%20arena>

7 <https://www.belizefsc.org.bz/non-profit-organisations-act-2023/>.

Furthermore, there is a perception among CSOs that the NPO Act does not offer any tangible benefits to organisations, such as tax exemptions or other incentives that could support their work.

Overall, CSOs in Belize are expressing concerns about the increased bureaucracy, technical and financial barriers, potential State control, and lack of perceived benefits associated with the NPO Act. These concerns highlight the need for further and more inclusive dialogue between CSOs and the relevant authorities and clarification to ensure that the regulatory framework supports the growth and effectiveness of CSOs while addressing their legitimate concerns.

Enabling environment in practice

CIVICUS⁸ rates the space for civil society – **civic space** – in Belize as “narrowed” (with a value of 73/100 in 2022), which indicates, according to the categorisation, a generally good state of civic space, but with some issues that can be improved. Belize is rated 87/100 in the Freedom index 2021, produced by Freedom in the world⁹ (with 34/40 in political rights and 53/60 in civil liberties). Free elections are regularly implemented, and the pluralism is effective in the Country, as shown by the recent change of government after the elections in 2022.

One of the elements to improve is related to **transparency and corruption**. Belize is not charted in the international index produced annually by Transparency international, since 2008¹⁰. That is because there is no sufficient diversity of data available¹¹. However, some preliminary steps have been taken by the State recently to reactivate the participation in the Transparency index. A preliminary estimation made by the government positions Belize between 47th and 52th position

out of 180 countries¹². Even though, the perceptions of the population on the levels of corruption are lowering for every institution since 2019¹³. There is a significant percentage of the population considering that the public sector suffers from some form of corruption (varying from 30 to 50% according to the different branches of the State)¹⁴. Some cases of improper behaviours of representatives of the State have been highlighted by the media in the last years. For instance, there is a case of a sentence from the Supreme court (2020) that sanctioned the improper spending of the then government, due to unscrupulous procurement processes¹⁵. The perception of Civil society is that incorrect or even illegal use of public funds is still quite common and not pursued by the judicial system¹⁶. The need for greater accountability and transparency of the State is widely felt by the population and civil society. Some steps have been taken in the last months (2023). The Civil Asset Recovery and Unexplained Wealth Bill, and the Whistleblowers Act are concrete efforts produced by the government to tackle this issue. Dialogue has been re-established with *the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption and with Transparency International*. Belize also received an official visit from United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), to assess the country's standing since ratification (December 2016). The next few months will show how this new regulation will contribute effectively to the improvement of transparency and governance.

According to the index¹⁷ implemented annually by World Justice Project, in 2022 Belize is ranked 85 out of 140 countries on **rule of law**, rising 8 positions since 2021, with an overall rating of 0,49 out of 1,00 (improvement of 0,01). This trend comes from the previous year, where Belize also improved three positions in relation to 2020. Actually, Belize is slowly but constantly improving its rating since 2016. The category where Belize shows the best performance is “Order

8 <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor>

9 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf

10 <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/belize/>

11 <https://amandala.com.bz/news/belize-excluded-from-the-corruption-perception-index-for-15th-year/>

12 <https://www.pressoffice.gov.bz/ministry-of-public-service-engages-with-transparency-international-on-corruption-perception-index/>

13 *The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.*

14 <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>

15 <https://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/197818>

16 *The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.*

17 <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>

and security” (rating of 0.71). On the other hand, the area where difficulties are noticeable is “Law enforcement”, which refers to whether existing laws are effectively implemented and applied. For this indicator, Belize shows a low rating (0.41) and also a low ranking (117 out of 140). This impression is confirmed by civil society, which considers this aspect of the rule of law as one of the issues on which to concentrate efforts to improve the enabling environment for civil society¹⁸. Belize has a solid legal framework, but the application protocols are weak or non-existing. There is a low interaction among ministries towards a multi-sectoral approach, and intermediate civil servants often lack adequate skills to implement the protocols. This leads to a poor effective application of laws.

The basic **rights of expression, association, political opinion, and religion** are generally respected and no relevant cases of violation or explicit censorship could be identified. This is reflected also in the perception of the Belizeans¹⁹. Civil society itself does not recognise specific limitations to freedom of expression, or situations of arbitrary actions against CSOs. However, a growing tendency to limit and discredit critical positions, especially in the media, is noted.

Belize has recently ratified²⁰ (February 2023) the **Escazú regional agreement**²¹ on access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean²². This is a legally binding commitment to support human rights and environment defenders, regarding their rights of access to information, participation, and specific treatment as defenders in justice processes. An action plan to implement a set of normative adjustments is now required to make the agreement effective, starting from the Freedom of information act that needs to be updated.

The **judiciary system** is generally independent. According to the analysis made by World Justice Project²³, Belize is

ranked 87th out of 140 countries in criminal justice (with an evaluation of 39/100), while in civil justice it has a better classification of 70 out of 140. The functioning of the justice system could be improved, but detainees and defendants are generally guaranteed a range of legal rights, which are mostly respected in practice, although some cases of rights violations are highlighted by the media²⁴. The main challenge for the future is to reduce the delays in the administration of the cases, with many defendants spending years in pre-trial detention. In addition, some categories of the population report some discrimination by the judicial system (e.g. the LGBTIQ+ population).

Another sector greatly affected by a lack of visibility is **individuals with disabilities**. Addressing this issue poses considerable challenges due to the prevailing taboo surrounding it among the majority of the population. While a few organisations are actively involved in specific disabilities, resources remain extremely scarce, both at the national level and within the realm of international cooperation. Moreover, the impact achieved through media coverage is almost negligible. Additionally, the organisations working in this field are relatively new and require further consolidation and coordination.

Trade unions are active and politically influential. They have a permanent representative in the Senate, elected directly by the National Trade Union Congress of Belize²⁵ (NTUCB). The trade union organisations are very structured internally (the most relevant sectors have their own trade union, and there is also the collective structure of the NTUCB) and externally (they are part of the regional structure of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas²⁶ - TUCA). However, they have long been encountering difficulties in renewing collective bargaining agreements for the different categories. Moreover, in recent times they have been in conflict with the government in relation to the attempt to cut salaries of public

18 *The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.*

19 *The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.*

20 <https://www.oacnudh.org/statement-on-belizes-ratification-of-escazu-agreement-27-february-2023/>

21 <https://www.cepal.org/en/escazuagreement>

22 <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2018/03/20180312%2003-04%20PM/CTC-XXVII-18.pdf>

23 *The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.*

24 *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Belize – US Department of State.*

25 <https://ntucb.org/>

26 <https://www.ituc-csi.org/trade-union-confederation-of-the?lang=en>

sector workers²⁷. It should also be noted that some of the ILO conventions have not been ratified by the State of Belize and the situation is still pending²⁸. At the moment, the trade unions do not maintain specific relations of collaboration or even permanent dialogue with the rest of civil society, although in the course of consultations with CSOs initiated by the EU in June 2023 they expressed an interest in activating a more structured dialogue, mainly through the joint presence of representatives of the trade unions and NGOs in the Senate.

The overall perception of the operating environment of civil society, **while not openly hostile, is not particularly favourable** for the advancement of their activities. While the regulatory framework ensures the preservation of fundamental freedoms and rights, significant challenges arise when it comes to implementing these regulations effectively and providing opportunities for CSOs to organise, establish structures, and fulfil their roles. Many CSOs face limited fundraising capabilities and rely on service contracts or co-management agreements with protected areas, which are specific collaboration contracts the State can establish with private organisations for the sustainable management of environmentally significant areas. As a result, CSOs tend to refrain from taking any positions that could be perceived as critical of the government, due to the fear of losing these opportunities. This cautious approach significantly diminishes their participation in public debates. Generally, the State views CSOs as service providers for sectors or geographic areas that are beyond its reach. The potential contribution of CSOs to the development of public policies and their capacity to make proposals are not duly recognised. Given this perception of CSOs' role, the State tends to exert control over organisational accountability rather than fostering a genuine and structured dialogue.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is a perception among the public of a **low level of accountability and**

transparency within the State. This is evident in the significant difficulties faced when attempting to access official information, even when it is supposed to be publicly available. The lack of transparency diminishes trust in the State's adherence to established regulations. Consequently, this phenomenon has an impact on Belize's presence in international rankings and studies that aim to assess the Country's situation.

As previously mentioned, Belize lacks a rating in the Transparency Index, indicating a lack of transparency and accountability within the government. Additionally, Belize does not appear in the World Bank Poverty and Inequality Gini Indicator (last updated in 1999), as well as other international reports that assess the country's compliance with human rights standards. These absences in key indicators and reports reflect the challenges in accurately understanding and evaluating Belize's situation.

Brief analysis of Civil Society involvement in domestic policies, highlighting key challenges and opportunities.

Civil society is a concept still to be defined in Belize. Although there are definitions of NGOs and NPOs in the NPO Act, for many organisations it is still unclear in which category(ies) they fall. Not to mention that there are also other categories such as CSOs (which are often identified with the NGO concept), or Community Based Organisation (CBO), not legally defined but usually associated with the grassroots organisation concept. Furthermore, there is no clarity on the universe of CSOs. There are several registers (including the BCCAR register, which is the subject of the NPO Act), prepared according to different criteria, which overlap and intersect in many ways, leaving uncertainty about the civil society sector.

Freedom of speech is slightly worsening in Belize. The 2023 World Press Freedom Index²⁹ puts Belize in the position 51, among 180 countries in the world, 4 positions lower than in

27 <https://amandala.com.bz/news/10-salary-cut-to-end-july-1/>

28 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103222 (C005 - Minimum Age (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 5), C007 - Minimum Age (Sea) Convention, 1920, C008 - Unemployment Indemnity (Shipwreck) Convention, 1920, C010 - Minimum Age (Agriculture) Convention, 1921, C015 - Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stokers) Convention, 1921, C016 - Medical Examination of Young Persons (Sea) Convention, 1921, C022 - Seamen's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1926, C023 - Repatriation of Seamen Convention, 1926, C055 - Shipowners' Liability (Sick and Injured Seamen) Convention, 1936, C058 - Minimum Age (Sea) Convention (Revised), 1936, C092 - Accommodation of Crews Convention (Revised), 1949, C103 - Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952, C133 - Accommodation of Crews (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1970, C134 - Prevention of Accidents (Seafarers) Convention, 1970, C147 - Merchant Shipping (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1976, Amendments of 2014 to the MLC, 2006, Amendments of 2022 to the MLC, 2006)

29 <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>

2022. Its score is 70,49 (-0,18). In spite of the declarations of the government regarding efforts for a greater openness to dialogue and respect for media rights, media operators indicate that there are gaps in levels of transparency, and in access to information. Also, concerns regarding the effective independence of the mainstream media arise from their economic dependence on the State, which is the main buyer of advertisements. This implies the possibility for the government to influence the editorial lines of some media, leveraging on their advertisements contracts. Also, some (non-violent) acts of victimisation have been registered towards some journalists³⁰.

In relation to **political representation**, Indigenous people, particularly those of Mayan descent, are not well represented. Mestizo Belizeans and Afro-Indigenous peoples are better integrated into the political system. LGBTIQ+ people face discrimination, and this affects their ability to engage fully in political and electoral processes. The same is true for women. As mentioned above, only 4 women have been elected to the House of representatives (12,9%), and only 1 woman is part of the cabinet (5,9%). There are some technical limitations to the exercise of the right to vote regarding the people without identification (right to an identity), or unable to renew their identity documents. This situation mainly affects the Mayan population³¹.

It should be noted that there are specific seats in the Senate reserved for some social sectors: trade unions, NGOs, private sector, churches. This allows for relevant spaces of representation to ensure the participation of sectoral representatives in the political decision making. Also, a demand from civil society presented in the Senate amplifies their voices and gets wider dissemination.

The entities able to vote to elect the NGO senator are the organisations affiliated to Belize Network of NGOs (BNN). To be able to vote in BNN elections, CSOs must comply with all legal requirements to be registered in the NGO Act registry and be certified as in "good standing". The Certificate of Good Standing, provided from the Belize International Business Companies Registry, states that a profit or non-profit organization (including CSOs) is legally existing and it is

complying all the administrative requirements established by law. Considering the limitations that many CSOs encounter in registering and maintaining their status (see above), the informality of the organisations or the difficulty to update the registry constitutes a limitation for a wide number of CSOs to participate in the Senator's election.

While a civic infrastructure has been developed around some sectors, such as environment and climate change, and many civil actions have been activated, there are very few organisations working on **governance and accountability**. Even though there is a widespread perception among the population of the need of improving this aspect, very few organisations are tackling these issues³². The vast majority of international funding focuses on environment, infrastructure, natural resource management and income generation issues.

The concept of **open government**, which encompasses good governance mechanisms and strategies based on transparency, citizen participation, accountability, collaboration, and innovation, is still in the process of being defined in Belize. The access to information, open data, transparency policies, and the promotion of citizen participation in the Country are not yet fully established.

A notable challenge lies in the structural lack of raw data and information, resulting from limited resources and commitment to their production. Despite the existence of significant information, it is often not disclosed to the public. During consultations conducted within the framework of this roadmap, CSOs have reported on several occasions where access to official information has been restricted. This is often justified by the absence of specific regulations allowing the disclosure of such information.

While modern information technology can support information access, there remain challenges in terms of technology access and coverage, particularly in rural areas. In urban areas, efforts made during the pandemic have improved connectivity for the general population. However, economic constraints related to the cost of accessing information and fully benefiting from such opportunities still persist.

30 According to interviews collected during the process of preparation of the Roadmap.

31 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1G8SnPbiQs>

32 During the field consultation phase, only 3 organisations active in the field have been identified.

Based on the consultation process conducted, civil society holds the view that the **opportunities for participating in decision-making regarding policies are quite limited**. Although there are established institutional spaces where CSOs can be consulted, these spaces are often characterized by short timeframes, short notice periods, limited dissemination of opportunities, and are predominantly held in the capital city.

Furthermore, these spaces for consultation typically occur when a regulation or policy is already in an advanced stage of development. As a result, CSOs are not afforded the opportunity to influence the overarching framework but are limited to providing input on operational details. CSOs express dissatisfaction with the fact that these spaces are often perceived as spaces for validating decisions that have already been made, rather than true consultation processes that can effectively shape decision-making.

In summary, CSOs feel that the current spaces for participation in policy decision-making are inadequate, as they lack sufficient time, inclusivity, and influence over the broader policy framework.

In any case, beyond the difficulties of accessing spaces for consultation that imply a significant possibility of influence, civil society also finds it difficult to articulate a structured action that would allow them to capitalise on engagement opportunities (should they arise). There is a clear and common perception that CSOs generally work in isolation, focused on their own institutional agenda and operational planning. Experiences of joint actions and partnerships are generally limited. In addition, opportunities for aggregation around general causes are also limited. There is currently no common agenda, nor is there a platform of demands from the civil society towards public institutions. There are also no mechanisms to articulate joint actions, apart from the Belize Network of NGOs³³ (BNN), and 2 networks focused on protected areas management (APAMO³⁴), and indigenous people (BENIC³⁵). Contributing to this isolated work is the fact that CSOs generally see each other as potential competitors for the funds available, rather than potential partners or allies in their demands and claims. This attitude affects the way CSOs work, both in terms of creating project partnerships and of strategic alliances for advocacy actions. It is difficult to find occasions in which CSOs from different sectors mutually

support each other's causes, in order to create broader fronts for the assertion of rights.

Brief reference to Civil Society capacity (key challenges and opportunities).

One of the defining characteristics of CSOs in Belize is their limited financial resources and small staff size, often relying on volunteers or part-time workers who have other jobs to sustain themselves. This makes it challenging for them to engage in broader institutional activities like strategic planning, advocacy, and participation in networking spaces. There is a significant disparity between organisations that have the resources to hire additional staff and those that rely on donor funded grants, private donations, self-financing, membership fees or service provision to generate limited income. This disparity affects smaller organisations' capacity to develop robust project proposals and creates a vicious cycle where they struggle to access further funding.

In addition to financial constraints, CSOs face difficulties in meeting national regulatory requirements. Many organisations lack updated legal documentation and struggle with the formulation of proposals, including innovation and incorporating key cross-cutting issues that align with funders' priorities. These structural challenges impede their ability to comply with the requirements set out in the NPO Act, particularly in terms of administrative and management capacity. CSOs report that the registration process introduced by the Act is time-consuming, document-intensive, and demands technical skills and financial resources that many small NGOs may lack. This causes many organizations to remain in a state of informality. This affects their credibility with public institutions, and also reduces their possibilities of accessing financing (formality is one of the most common requirements). However, the shortage of financial resources is precisely one of the causes that restrict the possibilities of organizations to formalise (see above), and this can lead to a never-ending cycle that's hard to break. Organisations often struggle to navigate the required forms and procedures, and the financial audit required for registration poses an additional costly burden. Furthermore, there is a general lack of clarity among CSOs regarding the implications of registration, future obligations, and controls under the new legislation. They express frustration over the lack of information, awareness-raising efforts, and meaningful consultation by the government.

33 <http://www.belizengos.org/>

34 <https://apamobelize.org/>

35 <https://www.facebook.com/p/BENIC-100071707150240/>

The government, on the other hand, explains that the relatively short timeline for approving and implementing the NPO Act is due to international timeframes established for such legislation, related to financial controls and combating money laundering³⁶.

The development of human resources with relevant technical capacities is considered a strategic aspect for the growth and effectiveness of CSOs. It is important for CSOs to have personnel with expertise in their intervention themes, as well as individuals with strategic planning and management profiles. This requires individuals who possess critical analysis skills, systemic thinking, and a holistic understanding of the processes that CSOs aim to address. However, there are challenges in acquiring this skill set, due to the structure of high-level training spaces. Some interviewees highlighted that currently, in Belize there is a predominant focus on STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in higher education, with less emphasis on topics such as human rights, anthropology, sociology, and governance. This creates a gap in the availability of professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills related to the social and human aspects relevant to CSOs work. It is essential for academic training institutions to review their priorities and criteria for higher education to ensure a more comprehensive and balanced curriculum that aligns with the needs of CSOs and societal challenges.

Furthermore, some CSOs also highlight the need for low-skilled human resources to perform various daily tasks required for running a CSO. These tasks may not necessarily require high technical or managerial skills but rely on individuals who are committed and willing to collaborate. Having a diverse range of skills and capacities within CSOs can contribute to their overall effectiveness and operational efficiency.

Addressing these challenges in human resource development, both in terms of technical expertise and operational support, can enhance the capabilities of CSOs and enable them to better fulfil their missions and contribute to positive change in society. Top of Form

Situation of vulnerable groups and how these are represented in civil society at large

Women: it is important to highlight that the Ministry of Human Development places significant emphasis on addressing gender-related issues and provides various social assistance programmes to support women in different vulnerable situations. Gender-based violence towards women and girls continues to be a major concern at the national level, along with the issue of sex trafficking, particularly concerning young migrants.

However, in an interview held in the framework of the RM development the Ministry of Human Development has acknowledged challenges in effectively addressing these issues, particularly in rural areas where coverage is limited. To overcome this, the Ministry is actively promoting partnerships with village councils and civil society organisations, particularly grassroots organisations. These partnerships aim to leverage the capabilities of these local entities as service providers to address the specific needs of the population in those areas.

The Gender Inequality Index³⁷ (GII) for 2021, produced by UNDP, puts Belize in the position 86 out of 140 Countries. The rating assigned is 0,364, compared with the average value for the world of 0,465 (with lower values meaning lower inequality), and 0,381 for Latin America and the Caribbean. This means that Belize presents a positive situation, compared with other countries. Nevertheless, there are some situations that can be improved. For instance, while the data related to access to education shows a higher female presence in education³⁸ than men, this isn't coherent with the data related with access to jobs. The differential percentage of Labour force participation among men and women is -29,9%³⁹, showing a dramatic difficulty for women to transit from studies to employment.

The National Women's Commission⁴⁰, funded in 1982, became a Statutory body in 2022, responsible for addressing gender issues and to coordinate all national efforts relating to gender equality, equity and women's empowerment. In particular, it focuses on dealing with the issue of domestic violence by paying specific attention to the rehabilitation of

36 <https://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/249719>

37 <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

38 79.5% of girls and 73.6% of boys complete lower secondary school in Belize as of 2021 data. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/belize/>

39 Belize labour force survey report (2021) – Statistical institute of Belize.

40 <https://www.nwcbelize.org/>

victims and promotion of non-violent societies, as well as in legal reform/decision-making. It represents a relevant opportunity to advocate with the main authorities and in the most strategic decision-making spaces. It is certainly an entry point with the potential to contribute to the defence of women's rights. Overall, there is no actual "women's movement" and clear trend in female organisations' activism, nor is there any strong leadership from a single organisation capable of rallying others to achieve significant and widespread progress in influencing national policies. There are numerous organisations working with women and focusing primarily on solving specific issues, such as health and economics. However, those dedicated to promoting women's rights and empowerment are scarce. The feminist movement appears lacking in strength and articulation.

An Equal Opportunities Bill that was being prepared in 2020 was frozen shortly after and has not been taken up since then⁴¹.

Mayan women face limitations in their participation in social and economic life due to the fact that many of them do not have identity documents. In some cases, they do not even have birth certificates. This condition prevents them from opening a bank account, accessing basic services (health, education, etc.), setting up a business initiative or a civil society organisation. The right to personal identity, recognised in international law through a range of declarations and conventions, starting from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), is very important because it enables the opportunity to exercise many other individual rights.

LGBTIQ+ population: there is still a strong social prejudice and stigma in all social and political spaces. This is fostered by the position of many churches with a very conservative approach. There are several documented cases of incidents of violence and threats against gay people, as well as a tendency to unjustified arrests or checks by police forces. The Yogyakarta principles⁴² are formally included in the normative, but little enforced. The LGBTIQ+ community has been one of the few to submit a shadow report for the Belize UPR 2018,

and is now submitting two reports, one specific to transgender people, and one to LGBT as shadow reports to the new UPR cycle. The organisations that operate on a regular basis are very few (3) and generally work in isolation, which does not help to position their voice in the environment.

Indigenous people: a major issue for indigenous people's organisations is related to the right of indigenous people to their traditional land. This right has been recognised by the Caribbean Court of Justice that established that the government of Belize was breaching Maya community members' rights, by failing to recognise their customary land rights⁴³. Also, the CCJ has established the payment of compensation for the breaches that two Maya communities had suffered (and which had led to the case under review). This resolution has triggered the need to resolve a number of land demarcation disputes between Maya communities and private properties or with other communities, which will need to be tackled in the near future. Maya indigenous communities have their own ways of thinking, seeing the world and organising (governance system) which is structurally different from that of other Belizeans.

At the moment the debate in the country is focused on the implementation of the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)⁴⁴. According to the most common definition (for instance of FAO⁴⁵), "*Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which aligns with their universal right to self-determination. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to provide or withhold/ withdraw consent, at any point, regarding projects impacting their territories. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to engage in negotiations to shape the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects*". Different views of FPIC were noted. Some interpretations see FPIC not as a yes or no answer to a project, but as the beginning of a process, involving future negotiations between communities and the State on the intended project. The discussion on this topic is becoming more and more charged, full of technicalities and legal aspects, and many people struggle to catch

41 <https://www.pressoffice.gov.bz/cabinet-will-not-table-equal-opportunities-bill/>

42 <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

43 <https://www.elaw.org/system/files/2015-CCJ-15AJ.pdf/>

44 In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognizing their rights and making specific mention of Free, Prior and Informed Consent as a pre-requisite for any activity that affects their ancestral lands, territories and natural resources.

45 <https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/our-pillars/fpic/en/>

the underlying concepts and implications. It should also be noted that there are debates and differences in perspectives regarding how consultation processes should be undertaken and the criteria for the representativeness of the people involved in negotiations with the State. Nevertheless, at the moment the Mayan organisations are among the most active and visible organisations, in the civil society scenario. They have a political agenda and a strategy for advocacy that are missing in many other sectors of civil society.

Garifuna people are facing a different situation. They don't have the support of an international resolution (such as CCJ resolution for Mayans) to defend their land rights, or their cultural rights. Even though they are recognised internationally as indigenous people, in Belize their position is not well defined yet. Also, their population is a lot less than Mayan people⁴⁶ and the use of their language is gradually being lost. They have an institution representing them (National Garifuna Council⁴⁷), that is also part of BNN. Their impact on the public and political debate is less visible, compared to Mayan movements. Their land rights' situation seems more difficult to clarify, because the Garifuna communities' territories are much more intertwined with private properties.

Migrants: Belize is both an outgoing and an incoming migrant country. Departures are mainly due to inadequate economic conditions and directed to North America. Thanks to the common language, Belizean migrants can easily integrate.

Belize is also a country where many migrants arrive, mainly from nearby Central American countries. It is the third country in the region in terms of the number of migrants⁴⁸. Comparatively, Belize has a stronger economy than most of its neighbours, and is therefore a point of attraction for those seeking better economic opportunities. It is also a transit country on the route linking other countries in the region with the United States and Canada.

In addition to other migrants, there is also a significant influx of forced migrants. In 2022, 4,130 registered refugees and asylum seekers were present in Belize⁴⁹. They come mainly from El Salvador (66.68%), Honduras (19.49%), Guatemala (11.47%), and Nicaragua (1.45%)⁵⁰. The Belize's Refugee Act does not recognise legal asylum status and treats all asylum seekers as potential refugees. In 2017 the Government of Belize ratified the Regional Integrated Framework for Protection and Solutions⁵¹ (RIFPS) to have a more structured response to this phenomenon.

Migrants coming from Guatemala, which represent the majority of all migrants, are mainly from the traditional Q'eqchi' Mayans and the Mopan Mayans. They often have family on both sides of the border and travel regularly to their country of origin. They can be considered as permanent migrants, according to their plans of life and their economic initiatives. This continuous flow of migrants from Guatemala is contributing to the "Latinisation" of the Country. Even though English is the official language, and Spanish has always been a relevant language in the country, now the population of Spanish speakers has reached 56,6% (compared to 62,9% of English speakers)⁵², and are the majority in three of the six regions⁵³. Also, Spanish is spoken as a native tongue by about 45% of the population. Competition for livelihoods makes migrant people perceived as a problem. In the border regions these tensions are almost absent. The migrants are managed as part of the dynamics of the territory, especially by the Mayans (who see their territories without the constraints of State borders).

While there are several actions targeting some categories of migrants (in particular trafficked persons), both by the State and by the civil society, the organisations active in the field of border management and regulation are very few and under-resourced.

46 <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belize/#people-and-society>

47 <http://www.belizengos.org/membership/national-garifuna-council/>

48 <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/belize/>

49 <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/belize/>; <https://www.acnur.org/noticias/belize-unhcr-acknowledges-gob-efforts-protect-asylum-seekers-amnesty>

50 <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/belize/>

51 <https://mirps-platform.org/en/what-is-the-mirps/>

52 <http://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/LanguagesInfographic.pdf>

53 According to data of the last census, held in 2018.

Youth: in Belize there are some youth organisations involved in specific topics such as environment, education, sexual rights, sexual abuse, leadership, arts but in general, the common perception is that, apart from some exceptions, young people have a low level of commitment to and activism in social matters or their commitment is short-term. Very seldom young people are seen participating in public affairs, in a village council, or as leaders of CSOs, especially in the rural areas. Generational turnover in organisations is difficult to take place, considering that young people with leadership attitudes and skills are few in number. This in spite of the fact that many international agencies and CSOs have a specific focus on this population. And most of all, that almost 75% of the overall Belize population is less than 25 years old⁵⁴. With such a large population, a more visible and relevant youth participation would be expected, yet on the other hand, low responsiveness from the State and society can be recognised.

Human Rights state of play in Belize

Neither Human Rights Watch nor Amnesty international produce a report for the Country. Belize will face a Universal Periodic Report (UPR)⁵⁵ in November 2023. In addition to the official reports, LGBTIQ+ population (mentioned above) and Mayan organisations shadow documents were prepared to be presented in the framework of the UPR process. In the 2018 UPR, Belize received 115 recommendations (90 accepted, 25 noted). 23 of them were related to discrimination and inequality (10 specifically directed to LGBTIQ+ people). Generally, the population is not aware of these recommendations, as well as the State's responses, although they should be public. There is little visibility of this issue in the media.

Cases of **police** abuses (such as unlawful detentions) continue to be reported⁵⁶. This is considered one of the most challenging topics to be tackled in the short period. According to a survey among the Belizean population implemented by World Justice Project in 2021⁵⁷, only 47% of respondents believe that the police do not use excessive force and just 35% of respondents stated that they trust the police. On the other

hand, almost two thirds of Belizeans believe that the police resolves security problems in their community (64%). That is a relevant element, considering the high rates of violent crimes in Belize⁵⁸. In the 2018 UPR, 10 recommendations received and accepted were about law enforcement officers.

An important recommendation in the 2018 UPR relates to the establishment of a **National Human Rights Institute (NHRI)**, as an opportunity to strengthen the work of check and balance now in charge by the Ombudsperson. There is a project in discussion at political level, following a study phase. Several aspects were analysed. It will be important to clarify the mechanisms to ensure the political and economic independence of the institute with respect to political power, considering that its economic sustainability will probably have to be guaranteed by the State. In the future, it will be necessary to develop a series of legislative changes to ensure the functioning of the NHRI, financing and interactions with other State bodies. It will also be important to organise a decentralised structure, so as not to exclude the territories furthest away from the capital. There is a common interest in promoting this issue among different international cooperation agencies. However, there is limited information available on the time and steps needed for the institute to materialise.

At the moment, the **Ombudsperson's** office is formally established and working. The new Ombudsperson has entered into force in February 2023. However, and in spite of a supplementary budget approved for this office it is reported that it has very limited resources, which do not allow him to fully exercise his important role of check and balance. In addition, he needs the collaboration of other State bodies, but the mechanisms for collaboration are not formalised. The establishment of the National Human Rights Institute would change dramatically the opportunities for civil society to claim for their rights.

Bottom of Form

54 According to data of the last census, held in 2018.

55 "The UPR is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. The UPR is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations" (UN)

56 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Belize – US Department of State.

57 The Rule of Law in Belize: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 - World Justice Project.

58 25,65 murders per 100.000 people, <https://wisevoter.com/>

B. LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs

In Belize, a previous Roadmap of EU engagement was implemented until 2017, and there is no direct link between the activities carried out during that period and the current engagement efforts. Therefore, it is not feasible to identify significant lessons learned from that specific timeframe. However, there are some general lessons and recommendations based on the experiences of the EU internationally as well as of the EU Delegation and its EU Technical Office, EU-funded projects, and other international agencies in Belize.

1. **Involvement of civil society in political debate:** Civil society should be recognised as an important actor of development and should be a matter of discussion in dialogues between the EU and the government of Belize. Civil society should be included in existing spaces for dialogue between the State and international agencies such as the Development Partners' Forum established and convened for the first time in 2022 by the Government. The participation of representatives from various civil society sectors can significantly contribute to the discussions on development policies and cooperation strategies.
2. **Building permanent and meaningful relationships:** Spaces for dialogue between the EU and civil society should not be one-time events but rather continuous engagements. It is important to ensure continuity in pursuing objectives and to make these spaces useful for CSOs, and interesting enough to invest their time in them. The voice of CSOs should be taken into account, and feedback on the outcomes of consultations and their impact should be provided to maintain the relationship and promote future dialogue activities.
3. **Methodologies for convening and consultations:** Efforts should be made to go beyond the group of the most consolidated NGOs and involve a broader range of actors. Consultation processes should consider the resource constraints faced by CSOs and incorporate measures such as reimbursement of travel expenses, shorter duration of activities, and decentralized consultations to facilitate participation. It is essential to include diverse actors beyond traditional NGOs, such as indigenous organisations, youth groups, academia, and trade unions.
4. **CSOs capacity building:** CSOs need to enhance their self-management skills in areas such as accountability, administration, management, and planning to function more efficiently. They also require capacities to engage with the State, including advocacy, understanding administrative processes, and navigating regulations. Capacity building programmes implemented by NGOs for other NGOs have proven to be effective, as they provide a better understanding of the specific needs and situations of CSOs.
5. **Sub-granting:** Many CSOs in Belize face significant financial constraints, hindering their ability to carry out essential institutional management activities. Injecting even small financial resources through sub-granting processes can greatly enhance their capacity for action and have positive long-term effects. Sub-granting not only provides financial resources but also contributes to strengthening institutional capacities. It allows small CSOs to learn through practical experience in areas such as administrative tasks, proposal preparation, management, and reporting. Creating intermediary mechanisms for sub-granting, where an entity receives funding and manages the distribution, helps build relationships between larger NGOs and grassroots organisations. This promotes greater involvement of grassroots organisations in strategic and managerial aspects and ensures effective community-level impact for larger NGOs. Sub-granting also fosters a sense of solidarity among CSOs of different types and sizes.
6. **Networking:** The experience of initiatives like the Spotlight Initiative, funded by the EU in collaboration with UN agencies, highlights the importance of creating partnerships and networks among CSOs. However, collaboration and networking are not automatic and require a deliberate effort to build a culture of collaboration. Small investments in promoting networks are highly effective because CSOs are receptive to such initiatives. Networking promotes broader context analysis, facilitates the identification of synergies, and strengthens collective possibilities for impact.
7. **Coordination among international development partners (IDP):** There is a need for greater coordination and synergy among international organisations working in Belize. While there may not be significant duplication of efforts, there is also a lack of strategically coordinated actions. Common interests and approaches, such as the promotion of human rights, could be more effectively pursued through joint initiatives and coordinated efforts.
8. **Mainstreaming consultation processes:** Consultation processes are increasingly demanded by the population and CSOs in Belize. It is crucial to include consultation activities in any project implementation, particularly for infrastructure and large-scale initiatives. This requires dedicated resources and time. Lessons learnt in the case of indigenous populations and the implementation of FPIC, have shown how community decision-making mechanisms often operate on different logics than project timelines, and the consultation process can be time-consuming and require specific resources. Incorporating consultation as an integral part of project planning and implementation ensures the inclusion of perspectives from the affected populations and CSOs, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. The EU is committed to uphold the FPIC in all its current and future projects involving indigenous communities in Belize.

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

C. THE STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE EU COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT AND AGENDA 2030/SDGs

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	RELATED SECTOR & COMMISSION PRIORITY	RELATED SDG
<p>1. Promote an enabling environment that will allow Belizean civil society to better contribute to sustainable development and the exercise of human rights in Belize.</p> <p>1.1 Belize government disseminates information on and activates mechanisms for shared construction of the regulatory framework on CSOs.</p> <p>1.2 Belize government improves the application of international standards and conventions related to CS participation, HHRR and inclusion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Governance. • Human rights, democracy, fundamental values. • Rule of law and accountability. • Safe and enabling environment. • Gender equality. • Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. • Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy. • Good governance practices and territorial approach strengthened at the village and district levels. 	<p>SDG 16, SDG 17</p>
<p>2. Promote a structured participation of CSOs in national policies as important actors for development and the defence of human rights, with a specific focus on solidarity and inclusive interaction between the different sectors of civil society.</p> <p>2.1 Sensitise the State on principles and mechanisms related to consultation and participation of civil society.</p> <p>2.2 Promote a national alliance based on solidarity, contributing to build a unified vision among CSOs.</p> <p>2.3 Strengthen the role of the civil society as a proactive actor in the democratic life of the Country and in the debate on national and local policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Governance. • Human rights, democracy, fundamental values. • Rule of law and accountability. • E-services, including e- governance. • Improve public trust in national governance. • Gender equality. • Safe and enabling environment. • Build resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. • Promote a global system for human rights and democracy. • Good governance practices and territorial approach strengthened at the village and district levels. 	<p>SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15, SDG 16, SDG 17</p>
<p>3. Contribute to the strengthening of civil society’s capacity to play its role as development actors and its capacity to participate in a proactive and articulated manner in Belize’s public policies.</p> <p>3.1 Improve the possibilities of smaller CSOs and NGOs to meet the regulatory requirements of the State and other umbrella organisations.</p> <p>3.2 Strengthen the skills of civil society to prepare and implement solid, evidence-based and inclusive projects, to improve their financial sustainability and influence national and local policies.</p> <p>3.3 Promote an increased availability for CSOs of human resources with skills and commitment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule of law and accountability. • Gender equality. • Good governance practices and territorial approach strengthened at the village and district levels. 	<p>SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15, SDG 16, SDG 17</p>

D. THE ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	ACTIONS (including analysis, policy and political dialogue, operational support)	MEANS (EU programmes / instruments to implement the actions)
<p>1. Promote an enabling environment that will allow Belize civil society to better contribute to sustainable development and the exercise of human rights in Belize.</p> <p>Expected results linked to this objective:</p> <p>1.1 Belize government disseminates information on and activates mechanisms for shared construction of the regulatory framework on CSOs.</p> <p>1.2 Belize government improves the application of international standards and conventions related to CS participation, HHRR and inclusion.</p>	<p>Dialogue with the State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote awareness raising actions (to be implemented by the GoB and targeting CSOs)• Promote vis-à-vis GoB enhanced consultations regarding the role of civil society (1.1).• Promote tripartite dialogue (UE/GoB/CSOs) on international obligations, accountability and governance (1.2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EU/Civil Society Dialogue.• EU Bilateral engagement with key counterpart ministries (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economic Development)• EU bilateral programmes
	<p>Studies / analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support the development of relevant studies on governance, Human Rights⁵⁹ and civil society participation with international experts from civil society, international networks, universities (1.2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support measures under the EU Thematic Programme for Support to Civil Society.• Future projects under the Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy or Thematic Programme for Support to civil society
	<p>Operational support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information activities on the CSOs' regulatory framework, obligations and requirements for CSOs, procedures' clarification, legal implications of the registry, orientation on whether to proceed to register and to which registry according to CSO typology, etc. (1.1).• Support to BNN advocacy action regarding CSOs regulatory framework, through institutional support, guidance to BNN, promotion of BNN interaction with State bodies, etc. (1.2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current project implemented by the Belize Audubon Society and the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) financed by the EU through the EU Thematic Programme for Support to Civil Society and other future projects.• EUThematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy.

59 In particular those related to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 and the Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	ACTIONS (including analysis, policy and political dialogue, operational support)	MEANS (EU programmes / instruments to implement the actions)
<p>2. Promote a structured participation of CSOs in national policies as important actors for development and the defence of human rights, with a specific focus on solidarity and inclusive interaction between the different sectors of civil society.</p> <p>Expected results linked to this objective:</p> <p>2.1 Sensitise the State on principles and mechanisms related to consultation and participation of civil society.</p> <p>2.2 Promote a national alliance based on solidarity, contributing to build a unified vision among CSOs.</p> <p>2.3 Strengthen the role of the civil society as a proactive actor in the democratic life of the Country and in the debates on national and local policies.</p>	<p>Dialogue with the State and Civil Society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilateral dialogue with the government on prior consultations, role of civil society. Promotion of multi-sectoral structured dialogue meetings with CSOs (2.2). Bilateral dialogue with the State on Escazú agreement and Open government (2.3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and Political dialogue where applicable EU/Civil Society Structured Dialogue (1 meeting every year). EU bilateral programmes. Established coordination mechanisms with Government and development partners (i.e. Development Partners' Forum)
	<p>Studies / analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping of the actors to be consulted / involved in an EU structured dialogue with civil society (2.2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support measures under the EU Thematic Programme for Support to Civil Society.
	<p>Operational support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness raising on the role BNN can play as a relevant entity for human rights and social issues (2.2). Promotion of partnerships within CS through EU projects to support civil society (2.3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current project implemented by the Belize Audubon Society and the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) financed by the EU through the EU Thematic Programme for Support to Civil Society; other future projects. Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy.
	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent and wider communication efforts vis à vis CSOs on the role of BNN in the framework of civil society landscape (2.2). Strategic dialogue with other international agencies to promote sharing of information and common approaches (2.3). Promotion of links and collaboration between academic institutions and CSOs to foster partnerships and collaborations in the area of evidence based research to inform decision making, policy analysis and policy influencing, advocacy (2.2, 2.3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU communication activities, including speeches, social media, etc. Ad hoc meetings with CSOs and academia. Ad hoc meetings with international donors. Future projects under the EU Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	ACTIONS (including analysis, policy and political dialogue, operational support)	MEANS (EU programmes / instruments to implement the actions)
<p>3. Contribute to the strengthening of civil society's capacity to play its role as development actors and its capacity to participate in a proactive and articulated manner in Belize's public policies.</p> <p>Expected results linked to this objective:</p> <p>3.1 Improve the possibilities of smaller CSOs and NGOs to meet the regulatory requirements of the State and other umbrella organisations,</p> <p>3.2 Strengthen the skills of civil society to prepare and implement solid, evidence-based and inclusive projects, to improve their financial sustainability and influence national and local policies.</p> <p>3.3 Promote an increased availability for CSOs of human resources with skills and commitment.</p>	<p>Operational support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on core organizational and technical skills based on CS needs, including but not limited to governance, accounting, administration, accountability, M&E aimed at meeting the technical and administrative requirements of the applicable legislation (3.1). • Awareness activities on regulatory framework (3.1). • Foster inclusion in EU-funded grants of activities for capacity building for CS on fundraising and innovative financing, negotiation, advocacy, networking, building partnerships, strategic planning and use of data, technology and communication, principles of HHRR and governance for CSOs (3.2). • Promotion of partnerships and mainstreaming where possible across EU-funded grants, of Belizean CSOs in general and CBOs in particular, as co-applicants (if possible), affiliate entities, or through sub-granting (3.3). • Foster inclusion, across EU-funded grants, in projects of activities involving international exchanges and interaction among CSOs, in order to capitalise experiences (3.3). • Strengthen BNN as service provider for CSOs, by promoting capacity development for BNN, service delivery capacity and promoting BNN's role among CSOs (3.3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current project implemented by the Belize Audubon Society and Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) under the EU Thematic Programme for Support to Civil Society and future projects. • Future grants under the Thematic Programme for Support to civil society and the Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy. • EU ad hoc technical assistance.

PART III– FOLLOW-UP OF THE ROADMAP

OBJECTIVES FOREU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	OUTCOME INDICATORS	TARGET	BASELINE INFORMATION (if available)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION & MEANS OF VERIFICATION
1. Promote an enabling environment that will allow Belizean civil society to better contribute to sustainable development and the exercise of human rights in Belize. 1.1 Belize government disseminates information on and activates mechanisms for shared construction of the regulatory framework on CSOs. 1.2 Belize government improves the application of international standards and conventions related to CS participation, HHRR and inclusion.	Number of formal and informal meetings between the EU and the Government of Belize addressing the issue of the regulatory framework including the NPO Act and future regulations in relation to the CS (1.1)	1 meeting (first year).	0 meetings up to now.	Notes of the meetings.
	Number of high level meetings with the government where prior consultations and the role of CS in a democratic state, and international conventions on HHRR ⁶⁰ and governance are addressed (1.1, 1.2).	1 meeting per year.	Political dialogue meeting per year implemented, CS matters are raised based on need.	Notes of the meetings. EU social media. Press coverage (where relevant).
	Number of CSOs joint information actions on NPO Act and regulatory system implemented (1.1).	2 actions	Communication from BNN to its affiliates.	BNN report on communication actions.

60 In particular those related to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 and the Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024.

OBJECTIVES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	OUTCOME INDICATORS	TARGET	BASELINE INFORMATION (if available)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION & MEANS OF VERIFICATION
<p>2. Promote a structured participation of Belize CSOs in national policies as important actors for development and the defence of human rights, with a specific focus on solidarity and inclusive interaction between the different sectors of civil society.</p> <p>2.1 Sensitise the State on principles and mechanisms related to consultation and participation of CS.</p> <p>2.2 Promote a national alliance based on solidarity, able to build a unified vision among CSOs.</p> <p>2.3 Strengthen the role of the CS as a proactive actor in the democratic life of the country and in the debate on national and local policies.</p>	Number of high level meetings with the government where prior consultations and role of CS topics, and Escazú agreement are addressed (2.1).	1 meeting per year.	1 Political dialogue meeting per year implemented, CS matters are raised based on need.	Notes of the meetings. Invitations to visits. Agenda of the visits, list of participants. Invitations to events.
	CS discussed in the meetings between EU and government on technical bilateral cooperation (2.1).	3 meetings per year implemented with government representatives where CS is mentioned.	Large number of meetings implemented, but CS is not a structural part of the discussion.	Notes of the meetings. EU social media. Press coverage (where relevant).
	A structured process of dialogue between EU and CS, to discuss CS priorities, criteria and possible joint agenda (2.2).	1 meeting per year (including CSOs representing women).	Meeting held bilaterally, or for specific events, not in a structural way.	Agenda of the events, list of participants.
	A clearer and complete scenario of CSOs is defined (2.2).	1 study undertaken and report disseminated.	The ecosystem of CS is not clear and defined.	Document approved and disseminated to relevant stakeholders.
	CSOs recognise the role of BNN as representative of more than a sector of CS (2.2, 2.3).	75% of CSOs recognise BNN as a reference for different sectors of CS.	BNN is perceived externally as mostly associated to environmental topics.	Survey during EU - CSOs meetings.
	Partnership among different sectors of CS are promoted (2.2).	All projects financed by EU in Belize for civil society encourage collaboration and alliance building among CSOs operating at/in different levels and sectors.	A project with the Belize Network of NGO (BNN) started in April 2023 and offers platforms for CSO dialogue, networking and collaboration incl. around policy influencing.	Project documents.
	Number of organisations participating in the structured dialogue with EU.	1 meeting per year with CS, in the framework of a jointly planned strategy.	No existing project implemented for collaboration among CS of different sectors (i.e. universities, trade unions, CBO, research centres, etc.). Ad hoc consultations for the RM.	Lists of participant, attendance sheet, press release, meeting report.

OBJECTIVES FOR EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOs	OUTCOME INDICATORS	TARGET	BASELINE INFORMATION (if available)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION & MEANS OF VERIFICATION
<p>3. Contribute to the strengthening of civil society's capacity to play its role as development actors and its capacity to participate in a proactive and articulated manner in Belize's public policies.</p> <p>3.1 Improve the capability of smaller CSOs and NGOs to meet the regulatory requirements of the State and other umbrella organisations,</p> <p>3.2 Strengthen the skills of CS to prepare and implement solid, evidence-based and inclusive projects, to improve their financial sustainability and influence national and local policies.</p> <p>3.3 Promote an increased availability for CSOs of human resources with skills and commitment.</p>	CSOs improve their information and skills on regulatory framework (3.1).	<p>At least 2 projects financed by EU offer capacity development for CSOs.</p> <p>90% of the known CSOs reached by information campaigns.</p>	<p>1 project financed with similar activities started in April 2023, implemented through Belize Audubon Society and the Belize Network of NGOs.</p> <p>Information shared among BNN affiliates.</p>	Projects' reports, evidence of the training courses, mailing lists, Social networks reports.
	CSOs improve their skills on fundraising, negotiation, advocacy, networking, building partnerships, strategic planning, use of data, technology and communication, principles of HHRR ⁶¹ , gender and governance (3.2).	At least 10 CSOs receive information and training through EU financed projects on the prioritised topic ⁶⁴ .	1 project financed with similar activities, started in April 2023.	Projects' documents, projects' reports, evidence of the training courses and other CSOs strengthening activities implemented.
	Universities are collaborating with CSOs in creating knowledge and critical thinking (3.3).	1 new EU funded project fostering collaboration between the national university and the CS in sector in the area of research and capacity development.	There has never been an EU funded project in Belize fostering partnerships between universities and CSOs.	Grant contract and project reports.
	BNN mobilizes and builds in house capacity through a team of trainers on HHRR ⁶² , gende ⁶³ , governance and CS participation and provides services to CSOs on these topics, fundraising and administration (3.3).	<p>A team of trainers constituted in BNN (respecting gender and diversities distribution).</p> <p>BNN provides services to CSOs.</p>	<p>BNN doesn't have a training team.</p> <p>-BNN provides services to CSOs, but not through training, coaching and mentoring support in a permanent way.</p>	<p>Roster of trainers.</p> <p>Agreements between BNN and CSOs</p>
	Number of grassroots organisations receiving sub-granting in the framework of EU projects (3.3).	10 organisations receiving sub-granting.	2 projects providing third party financing, started in February and April 2023, implemented through the Belize Audubon Society/ Belize Network of NGOs and Humana People to People Belize.	Project' documents, project' reports, sub-granting agreements.

61 In particular those related to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 and the Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024.

62 In particular those related to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 and the Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024.

63 In particular those related to the EU CLIP / Gender Action plan

64 In particular those related to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 and the Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024, and the CLIP / Gender Action plan.

PART III – ANNEXES & REFERENCES

ANNEX 1: THE PROCESS

How were MS/EU+ present in the country involved in the drafting of the RM?	<p>There are no permanent missions of EU Member States, in Belize therefore no Member States were involved in the drafting of the Roadmap.</p>
What consultations with CSOs were organised? What type of actors were involved? What mechanisms, if any, were used to ensure the inclusiveness of the process?	<p>Three regional consultations were conducted in the Northern, Southern, and Central areas (Orange Walk, Punta Gorda and Belize City respectively) with the aim of enhancing the participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from diverse regions. A total of 105 CSOs from across the country were invited to participate, and 27 CSOs actively took part in all three regional consultations.</p> <p>Subsequently, a national meeting was organized to share and validate the outcomes of the regional meetings. This final meeting saw the participation of 28 representatives from CSOs.</p> <p>To ensure broad and diverse participation, collaboration with the local network BNN was undertaken. For each of the four meetings, a list of participants was carefully defined based on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Territorial representation.• Balanced representation of officially registered and non-registered organisations.• Wide coverage of activity sectors.• Inclusion of CSOs representing trade unions and the private sector.• Representation of organisations advocating for women, LGBTIQ, youth, indigenous peoples and other relevant groups. <p>The invitations were accompanied by proactive follow-up actions from the EU Delegation, with the valuable support of BNN acting as a liaison with the CSOs. These efforts aimed to encourage CSOs to actively participate in the events.</p>
What mechanisms, are set up to continue the dialogue with CSOs? What mechanisms, if any, will be used to ensure the inclusiveness of the dialogue?	<p>For future meetings, the EU Delegation will continue to invite representatives from various categories of civil society to participate in the ongoing dialogue. Direct contacts will be established with sectoral networks, such as APAMO, BENIC, and other networks eventually arising in the future. Also, a continuous search of new contacts will be pursued during the day-to-day work of the EU Delegation. This approach ensures inclusivity and encourages a wider range of perspectives to contribute to the discussions.</p>
How is the RM integrated / coordinated with the JP process?	<p>There are no permanent missions of EU Member States, in Belize therefore there is no Joint Planning or other synergic initiatives with them.</p> <p>During the Roadmap preparation process, the most relevant international development partners with permanent presence in Belize have been involved in the information gathering and context analysis phase.</p>

How does the RM relate to other country processes including human rights and democracy country strategies, the gender action plan, etc.?

The engagement efforts with civil society align closely with the [Multiannual Indicative Plan \(MIP\) 2021-24](#), resulting in several intersections between the two. A key aspect involves the permanent integration of civil society into the prioritized activities outlined in the MIP. This integration will effectively enhance spaces for advocacy and civil society participation in the EU's sectorial areas of intervention in Belize. Including elements related to civil society consultation in future sectoral projects is a crucial component of the overall strategy to empower civil society outlined in the Roadmap. This approach not only strengthens the impact of the implemented actions but also ensures a greater sense of ownership of the results by civil society. Furthermore, as part of the due diligence process for projects financed by the EU within the MIP framework, the generation and dissemination of official data to civil society will be incorporated. This measure underscores the commitment to transparency and accountability and facilitates civil society's access to relevant information.

The Roadmap aligns with four out of the five priorities outlined in the [EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy](#), thereby making significant contributions in the following areas:

- Protecting and empowering individuals: The Roadmap focuses on promoting fundamental freedoms, strengthening civic and political space, reinforcing economic, social, cultural, and labour rights, and supporting the rule of law. These elements collectively contribute to creating an enabling environment that protects and empowers individuals.
- Building resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies: The Roadmap emphasizes the importance of promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making processes. By prioritizing these aspects, the Roadmap seeks to contribute to the development of resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies.
- Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: the Roadmap recognizes the crucial role of CSOs in monitoring the respect for human rights and serving as watchdogs. It also acknowledges the value of CSOs in contributing diverse perspectives and proposals to democratic processes. By supporting and strengthening opportunities for CSOs, the Roadmap aims to promote a global system for human rights and democracy.
- Delivering by working together: the Roadmap places emphasis on facilitating the development of networks and partnership actions among CSOs. By fostering collaboration and collective action, the Roadmap seeks to enhance the effectiveness of CSOs in delivering their objectives.

The Roadmap strongly contributes to the [Belize Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024](#), with a particular focus on the priority of "Civil society oversight and accountability functions." This emphasis underscores the Roadmap's commitment to strengthening the role of civil society in monitoring and ensuring accountability. Furthermore, the Roadmap also impacts objectives set for other priorities within the Belize Country Strategy, including:

- Strengthen anti-corruption institutions and legal frameworks: The Roadmap supports efforts to enhance anti-corruption measures by promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance practices.
- Improve public trust in national governance: By emphasizing civil society oversight and accountability, the Roadmap aims to foster greater public trust in national governance structures and processes.
- Improve data collection and evaluation systems: The Roadmap recognizes the importance of robust data collection and evaluation systems in promoting evidence-based decision-making and policy development.

Moreover, with regards to the [Country Level Implementation Plan \(CLIP\) for Belize of the Gender Action Plan III](#), the Roadmap intersects with elements related to:

- Women in all their diversity influencing decision-making processes on environmental conservation and climate change policies and actors: The Roadmap aims to empower and facilitate the participation of women, including those from diverse backgrounds, in decision-making processes related to environmental conservation and climate change.
- Women, men, girls, and boys, in all their diversities, fully enjoying and exercising their equal economic, labour, and social rights: the Roadmap strives to promote gender equality and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender or age.

What mechanisms are set up to ensure the involvement of MS/ EU+ in the implementation and follow up of the RM?

Currently, there are no permanent missions of Member States in Belize and therefore no Member States were involved in the drafting of the Roadmap. However, in the future, if a Member State decides to establish a permanent mission and representation in the country, appropriate steps will be taken to share and discuss the application of the Roadmap and the measures to be implemented in line with it. These steps will be initiated as soon as possible to ensure effective coordination and collaboration between the Member State and relevant stakeholders in Belize.

ANNEX 2: RELEVANT REFERENCES AND SOURCES TO DEEPEN THE UNDERSTANDING ON THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

- EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024 - EU
- Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024 - EU
- Multiannual Indicative Programme for Belize 2021-2027 – EU
- Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025,
- Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for Belize - EU
- CSO Survey results - April 2021 - EU
- EU country Roadmap for engagement with civil society 2014-2017, Belize – EU
- ‘Strengthening civil society participation in democracy through effective, inclusive, good governance reform and oversight’ project documents – Belize Audubon Society and Belize Network of NGOs.
- ‘PLANTS’ project documents – Humana People to People Belize
- Promoviendo un ecosistema de Gobierno abierto en Belize - OEA
- Strengthening Civil Society Organisation and Civil Servant Capacity in Belize through Partnerships – University of Florida.
- Common country analysis 2021 – United Nations
- The Rule of Law in Belize, Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2021 – World Justice Project.
- NPO Act 2023 – State of Belize
- <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/belize/>
- <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor>
- https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf
- <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/belize/>
- <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>

