



# EU ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN LEBANON FOR THE PERIOD 2021 - 2027

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Status:** RESTRICTED (only to be shared with  
ELI Member States for discussion purposes)

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**Approved by :** Ralph TARRAF, Head of Delegation, Lebanon



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

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## A. THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY: brief update on recent developments

Lebanon has a vibrant, diverse civil society, representing a wide range of voices with more than 10,000 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) registered at the Ministry of Interior and Municipal Affairs<sup>1</sup>. Reliable statistics on the areas in which these CSOs are operating are not available. However, over the past years CSOs have been successfully influential in areas such as free speech and media, civil marriage, death sentence, voting rights, women's rights, integrity of the judiciary, democratic elections and consumer protection. CSOs have managed to establish themselves beyond the provision of services and take increasingly part in advocating for policy reforms. Following the May 2018 parliamentary elections, and for the first time in Lebanon, a candidate outside the traditional political parties was able to enter into Parliament. This has given rise and electoral hope for the social activists and movements, already triggered after the 2015-16 garbage protests and who entered the political arena in the 2016 municipal elections.

The legal environment continues to be one of the weakest dimensions of CSO sustainability in the MENA region. According to Lebanon's 1909 Law on Associations, the formation of an association does not require prior approval from the government; the Law simply requires that the government be notified when an association is formed. Despite the fact that this law is considered outdated in several respects and although reliable information on the size and scope of Lebanon's NGO sector is lacking, it is generally considered that Lebanon enjoys one of the largest, most active, and least restrained civil societies in the Middle East. However, the last CSO Sustainability Index<sup>2</sup> showed that Lebanon is among the 5 countries which reported further deterioration in the legal environments for the CSO sector in 2019. In Lebanon, the issuance of registration receipts was increasingly perceived to require personal relationships with relevant authorities. Because of the increasing difficulties in registering as a nonprofit organization, several organizations instead opted to register as nonprofit civil companies, which involves an easier process. Concerning CSO sustainability, several events have greatly affected civic space in Lebanon from 2019 and

onwards. On the economic front, Lebanon is enduring a severe and prolonged economic crisis since many years. According to the latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM) released recently, the economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century. The banking and financial sector was in crisis, coupled with the depreciation of the Lebanese pound. During the financial crisis, the government failed to introduce necessary reforms, and refused to communicate transparently with its citizens. The turning point came on 17 October 2019, when thousands of people took to the streets to express their discontent with the dysfunctional political and financial system. Media reports called the uprising a "revolution" for exceeding prevailing limits on freedom of expression and breaking through the barrier of fear of prosecution when revolting against powerful political and religious figures. CSOs played various roles in these protests. Informal civil society groups and human rights activists played a vital role in leading demonstrations. New civil society groupings, especially women's groups, were at the forefront of protests. On 4 August 2020, a powerful and disastrous explosion at the Beirut Port left Lebanon, already facing social, economic and financial crises, with a serious humanitarian crisis. It was estimated that damages ranged from between US\$3.8 - 4.6 billion and losses between US\$2.9 - 3.5 billion (Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment, 20203). The COVID 19 pandemic and the 4th of August 2020 explosion of the Port of Beirut exacerbated further the socio-economic hardship and undermined further trust of Lebanese citizens in governmental institutions which they consider failed to manage the impact of the explosion. In a recent survey conducted by the World Bank among victims of the blast, the overwhelming majority of respondents report having "no trust at all" in political parties, the Council for Development and Reconstruction, or municipalities. These developments increased pressures for emigration, especially among the middle class who represent much of the country's human capital.

In response to the blast, and in view of the general absence of accountability and the cross-sectoral systemic corruption that exists in Lebanon there is a crucial need that the government takes responsibility for delivering on the recovery and reconstruction, while adopting a different approach, by working collaboratively with civil society and the international community. To this effect, monitor and track transparency,

1 Latest available data from 2015

2 CSO Sustainability Index: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vR67qHKltNwPQB8ANBzBUXEUxY50hHjQFsvCvUUYGUwJUnf2pxLkGI3jkdiBC-met0AK0oNm4skwAc2qM/pubhtml>

effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of aid and reconstruction in Lebanon that will advance reforms and rebuild lives in the absence of efficient government decision-making processes. In this respect, the World Bank Group (WBG), United Nations (UN), and European Union (EU) in cooperation with civil society, Lebanese government have developed a Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF), a roadmap to operationalize the findings of the RDNA and other assessments in response to the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut. Civil society engagement in the recently emerged political, economic and social conditions is a good example of how various representatives from national and international NGOs, as well as academics and research centers, joined forces to respond to the multi-faced crisis Lebanon is still passing through. Moreover, in the absence of accountability and the cross-sectoral systemic corruption that exists in Lebanon, civil society was given a prominent role under a new partnership and inclusive governance structure of 3RF bringing together the government, international partners, civil society, and the private sector; Civil Society is now serving under a Consultative Group (CG) as fora for decision-making and/or policy guidance and under an Independent Oversight Body (IOB) in reviewing progress and implementation of the 3RF and providing recommendations to guide the implementation of citizen engagement initiatives voicing citizen input through civil society representatives.

In a long run, citizens can be expected to be increasingly aware of the alternatives at their disposal as a substitute to the established political class. Many activists believe in a momentum and that ***“people are beginning to look beyond the usual politics”***. However, working for a successful recovery under the 3RF framework would necessitate an aligned positions in various sectors namely health, education, governance, economy and green transition. Following a large consultation through EU survey with EUMS, European Financing Institutions and key stakeholders (European NGOs, Lebanese private sector and NSAs, International Development Partners), consensus prevailed on a number of issues and sectors i.e. the fight against corruption (good governance), agriculture & food industry sector (economy), energy (green transition), inter-confessional dialogue (peace and security) and migration (migration and mobility).

All these types of initiatives are expected to be further replicated to ensure wider involvement of the CSOs in public life through the EU-Lebanon roadmap 2021-2027. International and local CSOs that have been active in the response to impact of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon through, providing basic services to refugees' communities from Syria were more engaged in helping addressing the urgent needs of the affected population by the COVID 19 pandemic and the port of Beirut blast of 4th of August. Despite a few successful examples of previous CSOs coordination, this hasn't resulted in a permanent cooperation or network. This is widely considered a missed opportunity by both the Lebanese population and donor communities as restricted cooperation and competition between CSOs has led to a duplication of efforts and likely inefficient use of resources. To this end, EU intends to exert more efforts on enhancing networking among various CSOs working on common objectives. However, following the multiple crises in Lebanon over the past year exacerbated by the explosion on August which destroyed the country's port and left many dead, wounded and homeless, the civil society responded immediately to this disaster. Collective initiatives with thousands of volunteers from all regions allowed provision of the assistance needed. The inaction and absence of state institutions was a reminder of previous crises where the civil society has been again at the forefront of the emergency response. This joint action by civil society was demonstrated also through the issuance of a joint statement<sup>4</sup> by more than 40 CSOs and networks calling international community to engage more with civil society, local authorities and the private sector to provide assistance to the most vulnerable and set safeguards against further cases of corruption in the country. Moreover, More than 45 Feminist activists and women's rights organisations signed a charter<sup>5</sup> to represent the concerns and demands for an immediate humanitarian assistance process to ensure that all women and girls' needs and priorities are met through a transparent and clear accountability mechanism.

On another line, CSOs have managed to establish themselves beyond the provision of services and proved that they are increasingly taking part in advocating for reform at policy level. In some areas, CSOs have successfully launched or joined lobbying initiatives to reform legislative frameworks within the country. However the Lebanese CSOs monitoring

3 RDNA - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/beirut-rapid-damage-and-needs-assessment-rdna---august-2020>

4 statement prepared by Lebanese CSOs after port explosion: <https://www.annd.org/en/publications/details/statement-prepared-by-lebanese-csos-after-beirut-explosion-the-statement-is-addressed-to-international-organizations-the-united-nations-agencies-and-international-partners>

5 charter signed by Feminist activists and women's rights organisations: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/charter-of-demands-lebanon>

and oversight role remains under developed such as is for instance the case in the security sector where CSO involvement is marginal or not systematized with only a number of them engaging in specific aspects of the Security Sector Reform such as protection missions, prison reform, rights of marginalised groups, and gender-based violence. Lebanon still lacks a consistent national framework that could consolidate co-operative mechanisms for CSOs that lack the expertise and credibility for being a sound interlocutor in a fragmented landscape.

Additional capacity building support has been provided to CSOs to enable them to act as a Partner for Development with the Government at the decision making level. This type of support was provided through various instruments, including European Endowment for Democracy to implement activities across Lebanon to fill the gap and to address the needs of some promising formal and informal groups operating in Beirut as well as in more remote areas of Lebanon. Further support is still needed in line with the advanced role CSOs will be playing in the reform process envisaged and supported by the International community mainly under the 3RF process.

To support CSOs in this context - and as outlined in more detail in PART II of this EU-Lebanon Roadmap 2021- 2027 - it is proposed to provide on one hand a more general type of EU support to address CSOs' limited technical and financial capacities, and on the other hand to provide support in a number of priority sectors, in particular: fighting corruption, building a climate change resilient economy, promote fair, sustainable and comprehensive social protection systems, as well as the Syrian Crisis Response. This support in the priority sectors could for example be provided by: - Assisting CSOs in the processing and monitoring of issues relevant to sector reforms (e.g. Security Sector Reform) by providing a conducive environment for a constructive dialogue between CSOs and for instance with security agencies on preventing violent extremism, an area which needs civil society

involvement. Building on previous achievements of CSOs with different security services, efforts could also be exerted on optimising the required protective and preventive measures against family violence in particular Gender based violence.

- Developing oversight activities, where new CSO groups have been or are in the process of working as “watchdogs” over government policies and practices in different areas. An example is the Lebanese Transparency Association, Nutdge, and Gherbal CSOs. Building on the achievement of CSOs in this area, and within the 3RF framework, EU support could be further provided to enhance their role in holding the government institutions accountable vis-a-vis Lebanese population. The oversight body established under the 3RF institutional arrangement will also allow holding both government and civil society actors accountable during the reform process
- Creating CSOs structures and mechanisms to improve the social accountability of public services, notably for EU funded infrastructural projects. In this sense, the water sector could be of interest where various projects financed by EU are already proposing such an approach to increase public accountability. Independent from the sector, an important element that should be taken into account in an EU strategy for this purpose is the support of collection and analysis of reliable data to help monitoring the value for money of the service provided. These data would contribute to the promotion of evidence based campaigns for CSOs. In particular, the environment, energy and security sectors, where Lebanon continues to suffer from weak government services, regulation and oversight could benefit from such approach.
- Finally, in mitigating the impact of the Syria crisis, EU support to CSOs continues to focus on assisting the Lebanese public institutions in the provision of basic services to residents and to meet the refugees' needs. Furthermore, partially in response to the Syrian crisis, INGOs have mobilised themselves into an effective advocacy network, the Lebanese Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF). Other networks of international and local CSOs have also been mobilised, with a focus on protection (e.g. 1% Network) and livelihoods (e.g. LEADERS).

## B. LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE EU ENGAGEMENT SO FAR

The EU Delegation has been involved in a constant and Structured Dialogue with civil society over the past few years which will remain the foundation of its action. Extensive consultations with various civil society actors, including young social and political activists, were conducted since the uprising movement in October 2019. It continued after the Beirut port explosion in the frame of the 3RF with the aim to enhance the voice of civil society in 'building back a better Lebanon'.

In addition, dialogue takes place bi-annually with civil society 'umbrella' organizations on the context of preparing and following up on the Brussels Conference. They cover issues related to the consequences of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon and cover health care, education (formal and non-formal), social protection and assistance, livelihoods, water and sanitation as well as protection issues. However, the EU Delegation work will go beyond. Opportunities for consultation, policy dialogue and operational support are currently being offered to CSOs/NGOs on the specific issues such as good governance, gender and human rights, and currently as well on elections and inclusive participation. Since August 2019, following the Port of Beirut Blast and in preparation of the pillars and sectors plans of the 3 RF process, CSOs were fully engaged among other stakeholders in broad-based consultations to respond effectively to the impact of the explosion at all levels of society and in all sectors of the economy, and to effectively reflect the needs, interests, and priorities of the affected communities and sectors. Building on this consultation process, the EU Delegation will deploy more efforts to deepen the strategic partnership with civil society at different levels for greater relevance, effectiveness and impact. The EU- Roadmap 2021-2027 is foreseen to contribute to the setting up of a framework for strategic, regular and sustainable consultation with CSOs in Lebanon.

With regard to the coordination between the EU Delegation and the EU Member States, the regular meetings of EU Counsellors held at the EU Delegation premises have contributed to sharing experiences and exchanging information on support given and identifying the needs of the civil society in Lebanon. When assessing the progress made in refining EU coordination in Lebanon over the past few years, it is evident that the regular association of EU MS in the consultation process set up with CSOs, including those organized under the 3 RF contributed to improving the impact, predictability and visibility of EU actions in support of civil society in Lebanon. The EU Roadmap to Lebanon 2021-2027 will contribute to improving further EU-MS coordination mechanism through creating a communication culture in which Delegation and EU MS staff work closely together on addressing issues such as on the economy, the environmental, or on women's rights and promote joint outreach events and activities to show that the European Union has a role to play, politically, economically and culturally. EU Delegation is updating EU MS on civil society related matters in the regular EU-MS coordination meeting to inform on needs and potential support to civil society actors.

On the other hand, in an attempt to ensure complementarity in the support of international community to CSOs in Lebanon, a quarterly **"Small Grant Meeting"** is organised among various Donors (EU and non EU funding donors) to exchange information on the different support given in various areas to the civil society in Lebanon. This has allowed donors to better direct their support to be based on actual needs and avoid overlapping. Another sector specific coordination groups lead by the Canadian embassy has the same purposes of information sharing on women's rights. Such type of support could be explored in the various EU Delegation or MS thematic groups such as the Human Rights working group. From this the recommendations on future work with civil society are as follows:

- Need to continue to advocate for an enabling environment in Lebanon to allow CSOs to reinforce their engagement at policy level and in monitoring the reform process, beyond service delivery;
- Improve internal governance, sustainability and outreach of CSOs using self-Assessment Platform that provides organizational certification based on highest quality standards;
- Promote further the dialogue between the Government of Lebanon and CSOs to be actively engaged in the decision making process and in monitoring the 3RF implementation process.
- Building on the 3RF institutional arrangements, EU Delegation to work on establishing a framework for an inclusive, structured , regular and sustainable dialogue space with civil society to discuss policy and programmatic issues, including the relation with human rights and the wider aid effectivity agenda, as well as to explore the possibility to take part in policy dialogues at ministerial level together with the EU Delegation and other development partners, and UN Agencies mainly on issues related to the implementation of the reform agenda under the 3RF process.
- Reinforce capacities of CSOs to promote their participation in local governance and policy dialogue together with international partners for shaping policies meeting citizens needs
- Promote further the use of Financial Support to Third Party (FSTP) in local Calls for Proposals to allow national grass root organizations benefiting from EU support.
- Consolidate the participatory approach and good governance in the municipal structures to advance policy and advocacy work at the local and national level.
- Partnership with the EU is seen as an added value, because of the proximity with EU core values.
- CSOs, foundations and associations are frequently used by politicians and political parties in helping their communities. Risk assessments on the political ties of partner CSOs to the EU should be considered to avoid EU funding being used for political purposes.

## C. RELEVANT REFERENCES AND SOURCES TO DEEPEN THE UNDERSTANDING ON THE STATE OF CS AND EU ENGAGEMENT WITH CS

1. CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Lebanon [http://www.civicus.org/media/CSI Lebanon Country Report.pdf](http://www.civicus.org/media/CSI%20Lebanon%20Country%20Report.pdf)
2. 2019 CSO sustainability Index for the Middle East and North Africa <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-mena-2019>
3. Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/lebanon-reform-recovery-reconstruction-framework-3rf>

