

The shift towards structured dialogue with CSOs at country level

Guidance note

September 2020

Roadmap Facility

Table of contents

Acronyms	2
1. DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND.....	4
1.1. What does the EU mean by “structured dialogue”?	4
1.2. The purpose and scope of this note	4
1.3. Structured dialogue with CSOs within the EU policy framework and the role played by the EU Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs	4
2. WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHIFT TOWARDS A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE WITH CSOs	5
2.1. Why structured dialogue with CSOs matters.....	5
2.2. What Civil Society says about the way the EU engages in dialogue with CSOs	5
2.3. Recent developments in the RM process regarding dialogue with CSOs	6
3. GUIDANCE TO SHIFT TOWARD STRUCTURED DIALOGUE	7
3.1. Set the objectives	7
3.2. Identify the spheres.....	7
3.3. Select the actors to engage with	10
3.4. Select the right tools	11
3.5. A template to draw a structured dialogue plan at country level	14

Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
CBO	Community based organisation
CSO	Civil Society organisation
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
EEAS	European Union External Action Service
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
EUD	EU Delegation
FBO	Faith based organisation
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
GSP	Generalised Scheme of Preferences
LA	Local Authorities
MS	Member States
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PD	Policy dialogue
PFD	Policy Forum on Development
TA	Technical assistance
UN	United Nations

1. DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. What does the EU mean by “structured dialogue”?

Dialogue is often defined as a **“two-way communication built on mutual interest”** (e.g. by the Council of Europe). In the framework of the EU development and external relations policy, dialogue exists at different levels, between the EU (EUD and MS¹) and the partner government; between the EU (EUD and MS) and CSOs and/or the private sector or between Civil Society and the government. Dialogue can also be multi-stakeholder when multiple stakeholders are involved.

With regards to the scope of dialogue, two types of **dialogue** should be distinguished. On the one hand, there is **political dialogue**, which, in line with the Lisbon Treaty or other legal bases, covers all EU external policies be they development, neighbourhood or enlargement, foreign and security, or migration policies. On the other hand, there is **Policy dialogue** (PD), which covers the specific sectors of the EU engagement in a country and supports the partner country's efforts to achieve the objectives laid down in their strategies².

The EU uses the term “structured dialogue” to describe the process of engaging with stakeholders in dialogue in **a planned, regular, timely, predictable and transparent manner**. The concept of structured dialogue refers to the **approach** followed in the process of engagement and is used in **contrast** to the term “ad-hoc consultations” or “one-off consultations”, where the EU seeks a specific input. In **Structured Dialogue**, stakeholders are invited to provide their input in a well-planned set-up, and they receive feedback of the outcomes of the consultations as well as information about the overall process.

1.2. The purpose and scope of this note

The following note is primarily about the EU dialogue with Civil Society, which **takes places mainly between the EU (EUD and Member States) and Civil Society**. The note is not about government engagement with Civil Society. However, by demonstrating good practice in this area, the EU may also be seen as an important “role model” by the partner country and other international organisations engaging with Civil Society.

The note focuses on the rationale and the process to structure the dialogue between the EU (EUD and Member States) and CSOs at country level, in the framework of the EU efforts to advance towards a more joint and coherent approach to policy and political approach dialogue³. The note does not address the entry points for engagement at dialogue level in the different sectors, since they are addressed in the **Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase** (which focuses on how to mainstream CSOs sector by sector).

Additional information about on-line engagement tools (in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic) can be found in the note **Menu of online engagement tools with CSOs in the framework of the update of the Roadmap beyond 2020 and the EU Post 2020 programming process**. The latter note also includes a draft survey which can be adapted and used by EUDs to consult with CSOs.

1.3. Structured dialogue with CSOs within the EU policy framework and the role played by the EU Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs

In line with the principles of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has assigned more and more important roles to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as it has progressively developed its **right-based and multi-stakeholder**

¹ Including also, when relevant, EU + partners (e.g. Switzerland)

² See EU Budget Support Guidelines 2017.

³ The New European Consensus states that at country level, Team Europe will enhance joint programming to increase their collective impact by bringing together their resources and capacities as well as using joint results frameworks to maintain momentum, inform dialogue and enhance mutual accountability. The May 2016 Council conclusions state that joint programming can be an effective tool to enhance coordination at country and sector level and reinforce coordinated policy dialogue; and the evaluation of Joint Programming provides evidence that joint programming processes can contribute to improving the political and policy dialogue. For more information see Section 4 (Consultation, Partnership, Dialogue and Communication) of the new Guidance about JP/Working Better Together.

approaches and its policies on participatory development and good governance. Engaging more strategically with CSOs constitutes a key pillar in these approaches and the EU commitment to enhanced dialogue with CSOs is enshrined in several relevant policy documents, from the 2012 Communication *“The roots of democracy and sustainable development”* to the new EU Consensus on Development, which calls for stronger and more inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships and reaffirms EU commitment to right-based approaches⁴, in line with Agenda 2030.

At a global and regional level and since 2013 a Policy Forum on Development (PFD) has been established, following the Structured Dialogue for an effective partnership in development, a process which took place between 2009-2011 and involved more than 700 CSOs and local authorities worldwide with the aim of improving the effectiveness of EU development cooperation. As a permanent space for dialogue of equal partners, the Policy Forum on Development recognises and benefits from the knowledge of all of its members in upholding the principles of aid and development effectiveness, ensuring accountability and strengthening EU development policy.

At country level, and since 2014, **the Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs have played an important role in the shift towards a more structured dialogue with Civil Society.** This is in line with the provisions of the 2012 Communication, which stipulated that *“the elaboration of EU roadmaps for engagement with CSOs at country level should activate and ensure structured dialogue and strategic cooperation, increasing consistency and impact of EU actions”*.

More recently, Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen has reaffirmed the EU commitment towards an enhanced engagement with Civil Society as part of the inclusive and equitable partnerships which are necessary to reduce global poverty and support sustainable development.

2. WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHIFT TOWARDS A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE WITH CSOs

2.1. Why structured dialogue with CSOs matters

The EU has committed to shift towards a structured dialogue with CSOs considering the key roles that CSOs play. CSOs **fulfil critical functions**, well beyond the provision and/or monitoring of basic services such as health and education or the provision of humanitarian assistance in fragile and post-crises environments. CSOs act as **intermediaries between the state and citizens**, reaching out to minorities, vulnerable and marginalised groups, and playing a key role in **mobilising and raising awareness** of such communities and citizens in general. CSOs moreover perform **paramount governance functions**, together with media, parliaments and state audit institutions, overseeing and monitoring state authorities, demanding government **accountability, contesting abuse of power, and bargaining on behalf of specific groups of citizens**. In restrictive environments they are often the most articulate voices around the promotion of human rights and in denouncing abuses. In conflict (and post conflict) environments, they play paramount roles in conflict resolution, peace building, social cohesion and state/institution building. CSOs are also active as social and inclusive businesses or members of multi-stakeholder alliances in **pioneering innovative schemes for promoting economic development, environmental protection, renewable energies, sustainable growth and alternative economic and business models**.

Civil Society participation in EU development policy processes is therefore **key to ensuring inclusive, effective, accountable and transparent development policies**. CSOs inform, enrich and can also contribute to oversee EU’s analysis and approaches based on their perceptions, added value and specific “people focus”.

Structural dialogue can focus on **one or several aspects of the relations between the EU and the partner country**: (i) Political, governance and human rights; (ii) The overall development cooperation, Agenda 2030 and national or sectoral programming; (iii) The very engagement with CSOs in the country (which is precisely the focus of the Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs) and/or; (iv) Trade and investment aspects.

⁴ Legislation, policies and programmes must be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, and duly integrate the achievement and fulfilment of human rights

The Gender Action Plan III (2021-2025) also calls for integrating a **structural gender perspective** in the dialogue with civil society, reinforcing partnership with CSOs/grassroots organisations promoting gender equality and women's rights and empowerment.

Structured dialogue is also likely **to save time, money and resources** compared to doing scattered *ad hoc/one-off* consultations and especially so if it is possible to “bundle” a number of dialogues, e.g. by establishing a permanent mechanism for structured dialogue between the EU and Civil Society. Last but not least, Structured Dialogue can help overcome the so-called “consultation fatigue”.

Structured dialogue can be formally established (e.g. through a Memorandum of Understanding, through Terms of Reference, etc.) and can also be **institutionalised** (e.g. through a secretariat, a task force, etc.) However, these are not essential features and particularly the latter requires adequate resources (i.e. dedicated technical assistance, funds for the organisation of meetings/workshops, communication resources, etc.)

2.2. What Civil Society says about the way the EU engages in dialogue with CSOs

Back in 2015 the *CONCORD report* assessing the mutual engagement between EUDs and CSOs based on a comprehensive survey filled by CSOs worldwide, concluded that “ad hoc EU consultation processes needed to be transformed into more permanent dialogue mechanisms to allow for genuine coordination on relevant matters”. The report also concluded that the range of Civil Society actors and the issues addressed needed to be broadened.

In 2017, a similar survey was conducted by CONCORD covering all countries that the EU supports. The report reached similar conclusions, namely that EU most dialogues and participation processes were **conducted in an ad hoc way and that they were centred on a limited number of organisations** and most of the consulted were beneficiaries of EU assistance. There were only a few examples of more strategic processes, but still only a minority of CSOs were invited to take part in the EU programming process (and most were INGO or NGO platforms). Also, **communication, feedback and follow-up needed to be improved**. The report also concluded that when dialogue, and even coordination, between the EUD and Member States (MS) were stronger (as it is the case in Joint Programming/Working Better Together processes), it usually benefitted the EU (EUD and MS) dialogue with Civil Society. Also, dialogue was easier and more effective when there were legitimate, capable counterparts from Civil Society. Finally, the report also pointed out that the Civil Society side of the equation also evidenced weaknesses, e.g. low capacity and lack of coordination among CSOs, making the dialogue with the EU difficult, without adequate capacity development.

Based on the above findings, CONCORD issued three key recommendations. First, to promote meaningful and inclusive participation by CSOs in EU dialogue and decision-making (i.e. in the **ongoing political dialogue** between the EUDs and national authorities; in the existing **sectoral dialogue** at national level and in consultation meetings between both the EUDs and CSOs and between **donor coordination** networks and CSOs). Second, to invest in **more systematic cooperation and dialogue with Civil Society** and, ideally, take the lead in coordinating joint efforts by other donors, especially EU MS. Third, to **share information** in a friendly, timely and regular manner, which is relevant to Civil Society (i.e. about the Roadmaps, on upcoming calls for proposals, consultations, currently funded projects, follow-up of dialogue with Civil Society), using all available and accessible communication channels, including online tools.

2.3. Recent developments in the RM process regarding dialogue with CSOs

The Stocktaking report of the Roadmap process conducted in 2019-2020 confirmed the conclusions of the two aforementioned CONCORD reports. As evidenced by the report, CSOs want the EU to listen to them. CSOs are not solely interested in funds; they want to be heard - not just sporadically, but on a regular basis. They want to see more structure, due anticipation and inclusiveness, proper feedback and a real chance to discuss relevant political and policy issues.

The Roadmaps also confirm how dialogue is paramount on the path towards greater engagement with CSOs. **Fragile environments** deserve a special mention. Open conflict, fragmentation of the territory and security constraints, increased polarisation of CSOs and lack of adequate infrastructure to support communications can mean that local actors are often isolated and cut off from any cooperation with their peers, let alone dialogue with donors - who may have even relocated to neighbouring countries. In **Middle-Income countries**, where the EU is moving away from a “development-tinted” cooperation,

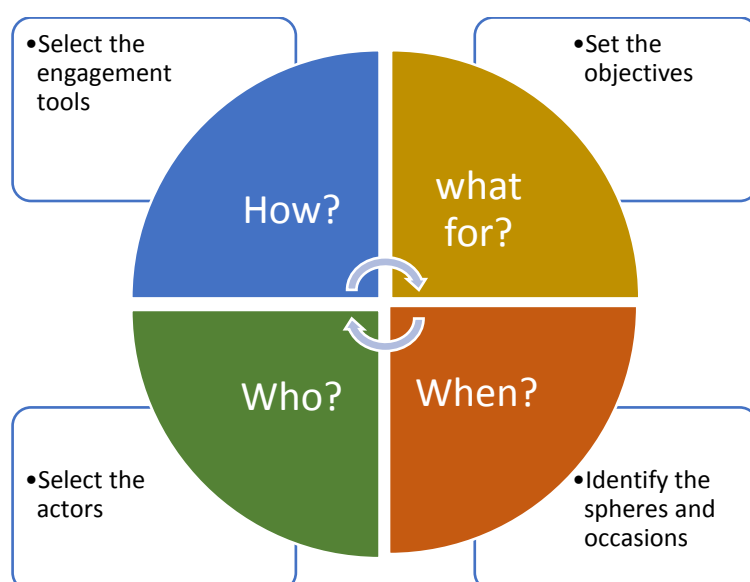
engagement with CSOs tends and dialogue tends to focus more policy, and even politically oriented forms but it is a general trend across regions, regardless of context.

Aware of these considerations, throughout the second generation of Roadmaps 2018-2020, several EUDs have engaged in better, often more inclusive and even decentralised consultations with CSOs, in an effort to make the Roadmap process more participatory and take account of CSOs' views and voices. What is more important, in a number of countries, as part of their Roadmap priorities, **several EUDs have or are in the process of shifting towards more ambitious and structured forms of dialogue** (e.g. Myanmar, Haiti, Bolivia, Ecuador, etc), as one of their key priorities in their Roadmaps, thereby establishing more permanent, predictable and structured spaces between the EU and CSOs.

What's more, the new Roadmap for the engagement with CSOs for the period post 2020 will include the promotion of a Structured Dialogue with CSOs as one of the key objectives to be included⁵.

3. GUIDANCE TO SHIFT TOWARD STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

Past experience shows that the **shift towards a Structured Dialogue with CSOs needs to be planned in a careful and timely fashion**. Accordingly, the following section provides concrete advice on how to further structure the dialogue with Civil Society.



3.1. Set the objectives

The EU engages in different ways with CSOs, with dialogue being one of them. Approaches can involve anything from **granting improved access to information** (with a view to improving the transparency of EU policies) to **consulting CSOs on specific strategies, policies or programmes** (to enrich them or enhance their accountability), to even ensuring their **active involvement in decision-making or in the provision of services**.

The table below illustrates the possible objectives and range of engagement, from the minimum of ensuring access to information, to the maximum engagement ensuring participatory policymaking. **When defining the objectives, they should be as specific as possible, in an effort to measure progress towards them.**

To inform	To consult & dialogue	To partner
Provide CSOs and citizens with timely, comprehensive and objective information enabling	Involve CSOs throughout the policy process to obtain citizen feedback on the policy analysis and/or	Involve CSOs as partners in decision-making, in the development of alternatives and identification or

⁵ Please refer to the new template for the Roadmaps post 2020 and short guidance note.

them to understand the policy issue, the challenges and opportunities.	decisions and ensure that public concerns and aspirations (also from disadvantaged or marginalised groups and minorities) are understood and addressed at the different stages of the policy cycle.	implementation of preferred solutions.
To ensure transparency	To enrich the policies and enhance their Accountability	To promote participatory policymaking

3.2. Identify the spheres

Dialogue with CSOs can be promoted **at different moments (or spheres) in the political, policy and operational life of the EUD**. The following table summarises the key moments (or spheres) and provides an indication of the scope of the engagement that can be sought in each one of them⁶.

SPHERE	OCCASION	ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY
POLITICAL /HIGH LEVEL	High level visits (e.g. Commissioners, members of the EU Parliament, EEAS/DEVCO/NEAR senior management)	It is common for EUDs to organise meetings with Civil Society during, for example, a visit by a Commissioner to get a better understanding of issues close to citizens. Whereas these may (today) be ad hoc/one off meetings, application of a more structured process and approach should be considered. Seen from the viewpoint of Civil Society the EU is “one block” even though the visiting delegation may be from different parts of the EU system.
	Human rights dialogue	Civil Society typically briefed before and after annual dialogues. Important to apply a structured approach and process.
TRADE	Trade agreements and GSP+	In line with the provisions of the EU trade and investment strategy “Trade for All”, trade agreements that the EU negotiates with its partners include Civil Society engagement mechanisms. These are a strong priority for the EU, in order to strengthen governance, transparency and accountability of such agreements.
COOPERATION-RELATED	Multi-annual and annual programming exercises and Sector or thematic dialogues, e.g. agriculture, transport, environment and gender	The Programming/planning phase consists of the preparation of multi-annual strategies and indicative programmes. Country (and conflict) analyses, lessons from past and present cooperation and other donors’ programmes inform the decision on the main objectives and sector priorities for cooperation. Programming instructions for the post 2020 phase will require delegations to conduct consultations with Civil Society and other key stakeholders on the preparation of annual and multi-annual programming, in line with the five new priorities of the Commission. When it comes to Joint Programming ⁷ , partnerships and collaborations are at the heart of joint programming. Inclusive consultations are therefore central to the entire process and a strategic approach to them is deemed essential ⁸ . Civil Society (as well as other key stakeholders, like local governments, parliaments, etc.) can inform and enrich the EU’s analysis based on their perceptions and specific focus (i.e. “people focus” for Civil Society, “local focus” for local authorities, etc.) Often CSOs and other key stakeholders (i.e. private sector) are involved at this crucial stage as part of the key actors being consulted when the analysis is undertaken. Other than that, dedicated sessions/workshops could be organised to share the results of the analysis and obtain key stakeholders’ feedback. This can be particularly the case in sensitive or fragile environments, and in contexts in

⁶ Please refer to the **Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase** for more detailed information on how the mainstreaming of civil society be done sector by sector.

⁷ The EU’s Global Strategy and the Consensus on Development make a strong case for ‘working better together’ at partner country level through tailored and contextualised joint programming approaches. The advantages of joint programming and joint implementation are summarised here so that they can be adapted for use in communications and advocacy with other development actors.

⁸ See Section 4 (Consultation, Partnership, Dialogue and Communication) of the new Guidance about JP/Working Better Together.

		<p>general where there may be a “gap” between national governments and key actors.</p> <p>Also, and once a first draft of the programming document is available, a consultation session or sessions can be organised to obtain feedback from key stakeholders around the areas of concentration which have been selected, the identified priorities, the design of the overall or sector strategies, etc. Alternatively, when live consultations are not possible (due to the current COVID-19 pandemic or other factors) , or in addition to them, on-line tools can be used to inform and collect written contributions from CSOs⁹.</p> <p>Also, the EU Delegation together with Member States may have established either ad hoc or structured sector/thematic dialogues (around the key sectors of engagement in line with the 5 new Commission priorities for the post 2020 phase). This is also relevant when budget support is the selected support modality. They can be used to obtain more thematic/sector-based inputs.</p> <p>Finally, annual programming and planning also allow for involving civil society in the confirmation and/or reorientation of support strategies following mid-term and end-of-term reviews.</p>
	Identification & Formulation of programmes/projects/etc	<p>The identification and formulation phases aim at further consolidating the broad orientations of the programming/planning phase, ensuring the relevance and feasibility of planned actions and preparing a detailed project design. The outputs of this phase are Action Documents.</p> <p>In line with the principles of mainstreaming and the commitment to Right Based Approaches, even in the case of programmes not targeting CSOs as such, CSOs as well as other key stakeholders should enrich the analysis done during this phase (by commenting on and complementing the problems identified and solutions offered, etc.) and offer their perspectives on the roles they could eventually play¹⁰.</p> <p>Other than bilateral meetings/interviews, key CSOs can be gathered in dedicated events (such as workshops gathering key CSOs) or be invited as participants in a larger multi-stakeholder meeting/ workshop, where the hypotheses for the project/programme are presented and commented upon. In particular, CSOs can be invited to attend as observers or informants the EU sector development meetings.</p>
	Monitoring and Evaluation	<p>CSOs and other key stakeholders can be invited to provide their feedback for the monitoring/evaluation of report(s) that will be produced (i.e. on specific programmes/projects, on joint programming, etc.) The idea is to get them on board to ensure an inclusive follow-up of the process and the integration of other views.</p> <p>CSOs can be invited as members (or at least observers) of steering committees, together with representatives from state institutions and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. private sector representatives, etc.) and can be consulted in the course of reviews, monitoring exercises, evaluations and audits which are conducted at the end of the implementation of EU operations.</p>

Dialogue should be carefully planned taking into account, to the maximum extent possible, all the potential spheres within the wide spectrum of EU engagement in a given country, to avoid ad-hoc, last minute “tick-the-box” consultations as well as fragmented or even redundant approaches, which may cause “consultation fatigue” on the side of CSOs.

The sooner and the more thoroughly the sessions are planned the better, as they require time and add extra workload to the existing tasks of the EUDs and MS in terms of organising the consultation meetings or preparing the surveys, identifying the participants, facilitating the discussions and exchanges, assessing and compiling the results and providing feedback. This is the whole idea underpinning the notion of **structured dialogue**, as opposed to *ad-hoc* or *one-off* consultations.

⁹ Please refer to the note: Menu of online engagement tools with CSOs in the framework of the update of the Roadmap beyond 2020 and the EU Post 2020 programming process. It also includes a draft survey which EUDs can further tailor and launch to obtain Civil Society views.

¹⁰ Please refer to the Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase for more detailed information on how the mainstreaming of civil society be done sector by sector.

To this end, beyond careful planning, it will also be important to avoid **promising too much and delivering too little** which leads to frustration and lack of trust and also, to ensure adequate **feedback** by informing CSOs and other key stakeholders consulted of the outcomes of the consultations and how their input was used.

Relevant issues/questions when setting the objectives and identifying the spheres

- Why do you want to engage with CSOs, i.e. to achieve what?
- What should be the focus and scope of the dialogue? What proposal or initiative, or what aspects of it are to be consulted on?
- What would you like to obtain as key outputs of the dialogue? Are you seeking opinions/views or data? Are you trying to build consensus around a specific area/question/sector?
- How do you plan to use the outputs? Will they feed a policy document? Will they be used in your dialogue with the authorities? etc.

3.3. Select the actors to engage with

Experience shows that **targeting and/or identifying the right actors** continues to be one of the most fundamental questions when engaging with CSOs, to ensure that the process is effective and - most important - inclusive. A common mistake is **failing to make all interested parties a priority by narrowly defining the stakeholders to engage with**.

It is important to make sure the “list” of CSOs is wide and inclusive. Important Civil Society actors in the dialogue include local or national NGOs, networks, cooperatives, private sector representatives, trade unions, Faith-based organisations and religious leaders as well as think tanks, interest groups and resource institutions with particular technical or personal expertise. Youth and citizen movements should not be neglected as well as the organisations representing women, vulnerable and minority groups. Local members of the Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) should also be included. A thorough analysis deals not only with the major groups and institutions but also with the diversity that may exist within them. Hence there is a need to **carefully map out the actors, their roles and interactions**.

Today, clearly, **most EUDs appear to be making significant progress in “reaching out beyond their usual interlocutors** (i.e. EU grantees)” and in **considering a wider representation of actors**. However, additional efforts to **promote inclusiveness** are still needed and a broad all-encompassing notion of Civil Society¹¹ needs to be adopted. Particular efforts are required to reach out to: (i) new actors which are active in the areas of engagement of the EU in the country¹² and; (ii) underrepresented communities and groups, whose voices are often not heard.

When resources are available (e.g. using the CSO&LA thematic programme support measures), **Civil Society mappings, political economy analyses and other Civil Society and governance-related studies can be intelligently used to this end**¹³, to better understand who the actors are, their structure, interests, capacities, roles and functions. They can also be instrumental to better understand CSOs' interactions amongst themselves as well as with other actors (public and private) as well as the environment in which CSOs operate, including the legal and institutional framework allowing for CSOs to operate and for Civil Society involvement in domestic policies (i.e. in the so called invited and claimed spaces for dialogue¹⁴).

¹¹ Including, but not limited to: Youth and women organisations, networks, foundations, trade unions, cooperatives, faith-based organisations, grass-roots organisations and/or minorities and marginalised group, as well as the local members of networks of CSOs that have signed Framework Partnership Agreements with the Commission

¹² For more sector-based information, please consult the sectoral fiches in the Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase.

¹³ Please see section “Who” in the Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase. For more information about mappings you may want to consult also the reference document: Mappings and civil society assessments. A study of past, present and future trends. Tools and Methods Series. Reference Document. 2012.

¹⁴ In some cases, also referred to as **invited spaces**, civil society is invited by authorities as observers, for consultation

They can also be instrumental to purposely identify underrepresented communities and groups and better understand how they can be represented.

However, due to resource and/or time limitations it may not always be possible to launch a mapping or a dedicated study. EU Country Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs, available studies and assessments conducted by EU technical assistance programmes (e.g. EDF-funded programmes to support Civil Society), by EU MS studies or by other actors (e.g. Foundations, etc.) can then serve as a starting point to build up knowledge about key Civil Society actors. Beneficiaries of EU (EUD and MS) support programmes (e.g. thematic CSO & LA programme), as well as the most vocal platforms and networks can also constitute a first group to engage with.

All in all, the bottom line seems to be **start from “what is known” and progressively build the case for a wider spectrum of actors to engage with**. Also, DEVCO A5 can support EU delegations in employing digital technologies and alternatives to direct in situ consultations¹⁵ and in mobilising resources (through the dedicated facilities).

Relevant questions when considering “whom to engage with”

- Which sectors of society have an interest in the issues that will be discussed?
- Who has influence in the community/area/etc. with regard to the issues that will be debated?
- How can these sectors be clustered (according to their interest and influence)? Are they represented in any organisations/bodies (particularly umbrella bodies/networks/coordination mechanisms) that can be identified as interlocutors?
- Which other sectors of Civil Society are concerned directly or indirectly and/or will be impacted (positively and negatively)? Are they organised? Can we reach them?
- Who was involved in past EU consultations? Who was not involved in the past, but should have been, and what were the reasons?

3.4. Select the right tools

Dialogue can be organised in many different ways. When it comes to consultations (beyond information sharing) experience shows that EUDs tend to use **events** (i.e. workshops, focus groups, sessions, etc) or seek written contributions, often relying on **on-line/digital tools** such as online surveys, webinars, etc¹⁶. A combination of the two is also possible and, often, recommended.

Consultations can be open (to anyone willing to contribute) or **targeted** (when a selected number of actors are invited). With regard to “live” events, two distinct types are usually organised: either dedicated **consultation events** or “**blended**” consultations.

Dedicated events involve inviting relevant stakeholders separately or together to dedicated consultation events, in which a series of guiding questions are addressed, and the participants are encouraged to provide their feedback which will contribute to/inform the design of the overall or sector strategy/

or even active participation in decision-making. Such participation will often be institutionalised and in some cases have a legal basis. In other cases, they may be more temporary, involving ad hoc consultation forums. **Claimed spaces**, by contrast, are established on the initiative of civil society, often informal, organic and based on common concerns and identification. They include advocacy initiatives undertaken to claim influence on e.g. legislation, constitutional revision processes, or discontent with public services or political decisions. The distinction between invited and claimed spaces is useful when assessing possibilities for EU political and financial support in a given country. The situation will, however, never be static and claimed spaces may over time transform into invited spaces and vice versa. For further information see EuropeAid (2014)

¹⁵ Please refer to the note: Menu of online engagement tools with CSOs in the framework of the update of the Roadmap beyond 2020 and the EU Post 2020 programming process. It also includes a draft survey which EUDs can further tailor and launch to obtain Civil Society views.

¹⁶ This is particularly relevant today considering the COVID-19 pandemic travel and public gathering restrictions that apply in different countries. Please refer to the note on on-line mechanisms for engagement with CSOs for further information about on-line tools.

programme, etc. **Blended consultations** make use of already established spaces and platforms (which can be both formal and informal), including elements of consultation in the agenda of meetings which are already regularly held.

When a national mechanism for structured dialogue, or a mechanism **under the auspices of a MS** or even another international organisation (e.g. UN, World Bank, AfDB or the African Union) or donor exists, consideration should be given to the EU making use of that mechanism (particularly when it is a MS-driven mechanism) rather than establishing/institutionalising an additional mechanism that may also dilute the limited resources and attention of Civil Society.

It is important to stress that **there are no blueprints** when it comes to dialogue. Indeed, the most appropriate consultation methods and tools derive from the objectives and scope of the consultation, the identified stakeholders, the nature of the initiative and the required time and resources. The **type of context** will also be paramount to choose the most suitable tools.

As outlined in **the EC Better Regulations toolbox**¹⁷, the selection of the most appropriate tools should take into account: (i) The **degree of interactivity** needed (e.g. written consultation, stakeholder events, online discussion forums, other internet-based tools) ; (ii) **Accessibility considerations** (in terms of distance, time and language) ; (iii) **Possible timing requirements** ; (iv) The need (or not) to provide **statistically representative results** (use of surveys) and; (v) **Public gathering restrictions** that may apply as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak¹⁸

The following table summarises some of the lessons learnt using the most common tools¹⁹.

INSTRUMENT	CHARACTERISTICS	LESSONS LEARNT
Questionnaires and surveys (online, paper) to collect written contributions ²⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good method for getting widespread feedback on aspects of a strategy/ policy under discussion - Good method for baseline information and regular follow-up from the same group - Allows for better outreach by getting a general reading of many people at once. It is particularly relevant in big countries such as Indonesia and India and/or in countries where access is difficult due to fragile environments and/or when a large number of CSOs need to be reached and/or where resources are too limited to organise live consultations - When multiple-choice questions are used, data can be easily and quickly compiled. Open-ended questions allow for richer and more in-depth answers but may be difficult to analyse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain what the survey is for and how the information will be used - Choose a limited number of questions to prevent “questionnaire fatigue” - Use questionnaires in the local language to allow for better outreach to local organisations - Use appropriate and straightforward language and questions which can be easily understood by participants - Find a balance between closed questions which are easier to assess and allow for greater focus and open-ended questions which provide sufficient space for participants to freely express themselves (i.e. say what they want to say) - Build on MS relations and networks to reach out beyond the “EU usual suspects” - Devote resources to properly assess the information and provide feedback to those having answered the questionnaire

¹⁷ The Better Regulation toolbox complements the main guidelines on Better Regulation in SWD (2015) 111. It provides more specific and operational guidance to those involved with the various Better Regulation instruments

¹⁸ For more information regarding on-line tools (including an example of the survey), please refer to Please refer to the note: Menu of online engagement tools with CSOs in the framework of the update of the Roadmap beyond 2020 and the EU Post 2020 programming process.

¹⁹ The Roadmap process: taking stock. Framework Contract Commission 2011. Report drafted by the Roadmap Facility. Lot 1: Studies and technical assistance in all sectors. Letter of Contract No. 2014/351923

²⁰ For more information regarding on-line tools (including an example of the survey), please refer to Please refer to the note: Menu of online engagement tools with CSOs in the framework of the update of the Roadmap beyond 2020 and the EU Post 2020 programming process.

Workshops/consultation sessions/focus groups²¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good method for gaining more information where issues will bring multiple views and you are trying to understand them - They can allow the building of consensus (if need be) around the questions being discussed - They also allow to hear how individuals react to each other and allow participants to interact and engage. They therefore allow for multi-directional exchanges rather than unidirectional sharing of information - They need to be carefully planned and facilitated to be successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain what the session is organised for and how the discussions will be used, so that participants know what to expect - Provide sufficient information and time in advance to allow for participants to be well prepared - Select participants carefully (see Section 3.3. who to select) and inclusiveness, particularly of women, youth and minority groups. - Hold meetings in a local language, use appropriate and straightforward language and questions which can be easily understood by participants - Structure consultation sessions into clear sections/questions which can be easily followed by the participants - Provide sufficient space for participants to freely express themselves (i.e. say what they want to say) while, at the same time, striving to remain focused on the issues to be addressed - Appoint facilitators/moderators (if possible local) to lead the discussions in order to contribute to depth and fluency of plenary sessions - Devote resources to provide feedback to participants, so that they are informed of the outcomes of the session.
--	---	--

It is also important to keep in mind that **allowing for genuine consultations takes time**, including for documents to be circulated internally with partners CSOs and their networks, permitting feedback to be collected from their constituencies, particularly grass-root members. All contributions should be considered, including the ones from the less represented participants. Also, not all CSOs might have and respond to the same resources, dynamics and codes of communication. A genuine consultation should take into account such nuances and send/ interpret messages accordingly.

Finally, all recommendations stemming from the dialogue should be documented and feedback should be given. Indeed, the **question of timely and carefully planned feedback** is of paramount importance to ensure the accountability of the engagement process (i.e. CSOs that are consulted have the right to know how their inputs have been used and what real impact they have had). It also avoids the consultation fatigue that seems to exist in many countries, where CSOs are often consulted but hardly ever receive feedback. Time and resources are therefore needed to assess CS contributions, integrate them in the policy paper/strategy/ assessment/etc. and report back to CSOs.

²¹ Workshops and focus groups (small discussions) are participatory techniques commonly used to bring people together to participate in the discussion of an issue or a set of issues which impact the community/where the actors have knowledge. The emphasis in both is to gather good quality information that can contribute to better informed decision making and improved outcomes. Focus groups often involve a reduced number of actors (around 7-10 per group) who are invited to contribute in a relatively open discussion. Workshops often include a more ambitious and diverse groups of participants, are more structured and facilitated, involving key speakers or papers. They may include buzz group working sessions.

Relevant issues/questions when considering the methods/tools

- Should dialogue be open to anyone willing to contribute or should it be targeted?
- Are there any geographical restrictions that constrain the involvement of certain groups? How to reach marginalised groups, areas, grassroots and minorities?
- What about linguistic accessibility? Is translation needed? Is facilitation needed to ensure language is friendly and jargon-free?
- Is it possible to organise live events or should we rely on on-line tools, or a combination of both?
- Who will manage the dialogue (e.g. EU, CSOs, others?) and who will ensure the facilitation?
- Do we have the adequate tools - such as flipcharts, voting tools, PowerPoint - and do the discussion channels including secure communication?
- What is the best way to ensure feedback? Who will write and share the minutes? What are the action points and deadlines? When will the next meeting take place?
- How will costs be covered?

3.5. A template to draw a structured dialogue plan at country level

Finally, it may be useful to prepare for the entire EUD an overview of the foreseen occasions for dialogue with Civil Society throughout a given year with a view **to ensuring consistency, avoiding duplication and/or exploring the possibility to “bundle” a number of dialogues and thereby save resources**. This is also a way to ensure crucial cooperation between the political and operational sections of the delegation.

The following template can be further tailored to the EUD needs and used to this end.

Objectives	Expected outputs	Sphere	CS actors to engage with	Selection of methods and tools	Timing	Responsibilities (EUD/MS/CSOs)	Further considerations
WHY?	WHAT FOR?	WHERE?	WHO?	HOW?	WHEN?	WHO LEADS ?	