



Civil Society Consultations in Partner Countries

2023 Report on EU Delegations' Engagement
with Civil Society

European Commission Directorate-General
for International Partnerships (G2)



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Abbreviations

AAP	Annual Action Plan
AP	Action Plan
CBO	Community-based organisation
C&D	Consultations & dialogue
CLIP	Country Level Implementation Plan
CS	Civil Society
CSFP	Civil Society Focal Point
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CS RM	Civil Society Roadmaps
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GG	Global Gateway
GRO	Grassroots organisation
HoC	Head of Cooperation
HoD	Head of Delegation
HRDCS	Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies
DG INTPA	Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships
MIP	Multi Annual Indicative Programme
MS	Member States
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
PA	Priority Area
RMF	Roadmap Facility
SD	Structured Dialogue
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
WRO	Women's Rights Organisations
YAS	Youth Advisory Structure
YSB	Youth Sounding Board



Executive Summary

The European Union (EU) recognises the significance of civil society's diversity and multi-faceted role in governance and development. The EU's commitment to supporting and collaborating with civil society is reflected in numerous EU policy statements and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe Regulation, since the publication of the 2012 Communication "[The Roots of Democracy and sustainable development](#)". Furthermore, this commitment is embedded in **the Global Gateway Communication**,¹ which is a value-driven strategy based on the Union's high social, environmental, fiscal, and labour standards, and strongly underpinned by a human rights-based approach (HRBA). In particular, the Global Gateway (GG) principle on good governance and transparency underlines that **"those most affected by potential projects must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement."** In the words of the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen:² *"Civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial partners in the roll out of the Global Gateway, in particular at country level"*.³ Commissioner Urpilainen emphasises the role of EU Delegations (EUDs) in connecting with local CSOs those 'experts on the ground', establishing a dialogue with them to feed into the design and implementation of European policies, programmes and projects⁴.

This report examines the consultations and dialogue held by EU Delegations (EUDs) with CSOs at the country level in 2023, analysing both quantitative and qualitative aspects, also drawing upon recommendations set forth by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)⁵, CONCORD⁶, and other international benchmarks. It represents the third iteration of this annual analysis and therefore it also presents trends derived over the course of three years analysed.⁷

Key findings and trends:

- a) **Consultations and dialogue with CSOs are becoming a cornerstone of EU policy development and implementation in partner countries**, marked by a clear shift towards more regular and strategic engagements. In 2023, consultations with CSOs were conducted in nearly all countries⁸, with a predominant focus on local CSOs (82% of all CSOs consulted). These consultations covered a broad range of policy and programme areas, extending beyond traditional civil society issues such as human development, as education, health, human rights and gender. They also included discussions at the highest levels with the Head of Delegation.
- b) **Out of 101 EUDs, 69 consulted with CSOs on GG initiatives in 2023. The climate and energy sector saw the most extensive CSO involvement**, with 69 EUDs at least informing CSOs, and 35 EUDs actively consulting them during the design and/or implementation stages. In contrast,

1 Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank The Global Gateway (1.12.2021) available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021JC0030>

2 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_23_1805

3 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_1805

4 Jutta Urpilainen. Commissioner for International Partnerships. Mission letter. 1 December 2019

5 OECD, DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, OECD/LEGAL/5021

6 CONCORD, Building partnerships through meaningful consultation: 7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making, October 2022

7 The first report was produced in 2022, based on a survey targeting EUDs in INTPA countries to collect data on practices of consultations and dialogue with CSOs in 2021. The second report was produced in 2023, based on a similar survey to assess data and information from 2022.

8 In 2023, consultations with CSOs occurred in 100 out of the 101 countries surveyed. The only exception was the EUD in Eritrea, which did not hold any consultations with CSOs.



consultations in other sectors, such as digital, health, and transport, were comparatively limited. This **strong engagement in climate and energy projects** aligns with the EU's strategic focus on Green Deals and sustainable energy transition, with more than 56% of GG flagship initiatives being focused on this sector in 2023.

However, the data indicates that consultations regarding the Global Gateway remain in their early stages often following an ad-hoc approach. This is partially due to **EUDs having engaged with civil society on GG initiatives for the first time in 2023**. In fact, following the adoption of the Joint Communication in December 2021 and the endorsement of the first GG flagship projects by the Council in 2023, there is a **natural time lag in engagement with civil society which should improve in 2024 and beyond**. Finally, GG initiatives are foremost characterised by "hard" infrastructure projects, requiring a different consultation approach and the involvement of a broader range of actors compared to traditional EU programmes. In this context, there is a **critical need to engage CSOs that represent communities directly affected by GG projects**, which "*must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement.*"⁹ (see also point 7 below). Practical guidance for EUDs on how to conduct consultations related to Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs), the main implementation modality of GG, was not made available until June 2024.

- c) EUDs showed **sustained engagement with organisations representing women and youth** and/or focusing on gender equality, women's and youth empowerment – which comprised 28% of the total CSOs consulted in 2023 across all the DG-INTPA countries (15% women's CSOs and 13% youth CSOs) – underscoring the EU's commitment to these groups, as outlined in the GAP III and the Youth Action Plan. This approach not only aligns with international commitments and priorities but also acknowledges the crucial role women and youth play in fostering sustainable and resilient societies. Notably, **the contributions of women's organisations** considered highly relevant by respondents have **significantly increased, rising from 43% in 2021 to nearly 75% in 2023**. In the case of **youth organisations**, 43% of the EUDs rate their overall contributions highly relevant, suggesting there is **still room for improvement in engaging with them**.
- d) **Consultations with CSOs are consistently occurring around NDICI-Global Europe at the country level**, especially across Multi Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) priority areas, including TEIs. **In 2023, 92 EUDs consulted CSOs on NDICI-Global Europe**, a substantial increase of 34 EUDs compared to 2021, signalling that this practice is becoming institutionalised. CSOs were engaged across all thematic priorities, including the AAP, which showed remarkable progress (from 35 EUDs in 2021 to 77 in 2023) and the Mid-Term Review (held in 2023). Moreover, CSO involvement in TEIs is rapidly gaining momentum, with 81 EUDs engaging CSOs in 2023, a notable increase from 60 in 2022. This trend is particularly pronounced in the implementation and monitoring phases of TEIs.
- e) **The data underscores the crucial significance of political dialogue with CSOs**, including with the Head of Delegation (HoD), with 95 EUDs having organised such consultations in 2023, up from 92 in 2022. In 2023, almost half (45%) of these consultations took place in a structured and regular manner. This improvement in the dialogue demonstrates **a move towards a higher-level approach to engaging with CSOs**. The balance achieved between ad-hoc and more regular and even structured consultations indicates a nuanced understanding of both the need for flexible mechanisms and the benefits of consistent engagement at higher level. This shift towards a higher-level dialogue demonstrates **a growing recognition of CSOs vital roles**, positioning them as essential partners of the EU in shaping institutional relations with partner countries.

⁹ Ibid 1, Joint Communication on Global Gateway.



- f) EUDs progressively **broadened the diversity of interlocutors in dialogue**, paying more attention to the specificities of the local context, marked by **a substantial improvement of engaging with grassroots¹⁰, community-based organisations¹¹**. The substantial improvement in the engagement with grassroots and community-based organisations (which accounted for 50% of the CSOs consulted in 2023, compared to 20% in 2021) reflects sustained efforts to broaden the range of interlocutors and pay more attention to the specificities of the local context in dialogue. EUDs are making concerted efforts to capture the pulse at the grassroots level, reflecting a commitment to understanding and addressing local realities and needs. **This approach is critical for ensuring that EU actions are informed by – and benefit – those who are directly affected by policies and programmes.** However, it is not yet adopted across all EU programmatic areas and needs to be deepened in relation to the roll-out of the GG initiatives.
- g) **Inclusion and diversity in the Global Gateway:** The analysis highlights the efforts by the EUDs to incorporate diverse civil society actors in consultations related to the GG. Although these efforts are still in their early stages, there is **notable involvement of CSOs focused on GG-related thematic issues, as well as those representing the private sector.** However, there is **room for improvement in expanding these dialogues to include CSOs that represent communities and vulnerable groups directly affected by GG initiatives.** Currently, only 24 EUDs (35% of those holding consultations on GG) have engaged such groups. Similarly, the participation of labour organisations, SME representative bodies, women's and youth groups, and other relevant CSOs¹² remains limited. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of ensuring consistent, transparent, and inclusive CSO participation at all stages of GG projects. This approach is critical for the success of these initiatives, ensuring alignment with GG's value-based framework and fostering meaningful local stakeholder engagement. **Increasing the diversity of CSO participation** is pivotal to ensuring that GG initiatives reflect a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests, **particularly those of underrepresented and directly affected groups.** This, in turn, **will enhance the efficacy, reach, and accountability of GG's rollout, ultimately strengthening its impact and sustainability.** The creation of dialogue spaces around GG implementation at both central and country levels is expected to further promote inclusion and engagement.
- h) **Impact of consultation with CSOs: Consultations with civil society have a tangible impact on policy and programmes.** 4 out of 5 EUDs (81 EUDs) have reported positive outcomes, such as modifications in their policies and funding strategies, enhanced relationships with CSOs, and increased capacities of CSOs or other areas, which can be directly linked to consultations and dialogue with CSOs. This marks a substantial improvement from 2021, when just over 50 EUDs reported such impacts. It underscores the growing recognition of how sustained CSO engagement informs and shapes EU policy decisions and strategies.¹³

¹⁰ In this context, Grassroots Organisations are defined as organisations, formal or informal, not-for profit, with little or no hierarchical structure, bringing together citizens with a common concern related to social, economic, or environmental issues, and/or citizens experiencing similar discriminations related to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, age, or other. Generally, grassroots organisations rely mainly on their members to conduct their activities, not seeking access to financial resources from donors.

¹¹ CBOs In this context, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are defined as membership organisations, formal or informal, operating at local level (sub-national, municipal), not-for-profit, direct emanation of a community or of a segment of it, whose objective is to improve the wellbeing of its members and the overall community in areas related to social, economic, cultural, and/or environmental issues. Their resources are mainly in-kind, constituted by contributions of the members and of the community, with occasional access to financial resources from donations, small grants (through partner CSOs or directly from donors) and others.

¹² Relevant CSOs are defined as CSOs with a stake on the core issues discussed during the consultations. Relevance can be defined by: the thematic or sectoral engagement and experience of the CSOs; or by the fact that CSOs are affected positively or negatively, by the issues at the core of EU consultations; or by the influence a CSO or group of CSOs have on the issues.

¹³ The impact of consultations and dialogue with CSOs is influenced by several key factors, among which the relevance of participating CSOs (mentioned by 59 of EUDs in 2023, up from 49 in 2022), effective engagement with CSOs during and beyond dialogue (53 EUDs in 2023, 47 in 2022), the capacity and preparedness of CSOs to contribute to dialogue (38 in 2023, 37 in 2022), and a favourable context and opportunities essential to trigger change (26 in 2023, 20 in 2022).



- i) The **quality of EUDs consultations with CSOs has improved significantly** over time. While ad-hoc consultations¹⁴ still dominate across the spectrum of EU programmatic areas, indicating a flexible yet reactive approach, there is **a noticeable shift towards regular,¹⁵ meaningful, and strategic consultations.** In some, these have evolved into a Structured Dialogue,¹⁶ particularly ahead of the political dialogues with partner countries led by the HoD and political section of the EUD, as well as in the frame of the Civil Society Roadmap process. This evolution indicates that **EUDs are adopting a more consistent approach to civil society interactions, striking a balance between responsiveness and a more Structured Dialogue.** This advancement marks a concerted effort towards creating a stable environment where civil society can anticipate and prepare for consultations, rather than react to them. It shows a commitment to fostering predictable and reliable channels for civil society inputs into EU policies and programmes.
- j) **Consultations between EUDs and civil society are gradually shifting from EUD-led consultations to more balanced, two-way dialogues.** The data indicates that a core group of 30 EUDs have embraced a more co-created approach, consistently applying it, and fostering fruitful exchanges with CSOs. However, the majority of EUDs only apply these co-created practices occasionally.¹⁷ Furthermore, consultations continue to be predominantly centralised, with 64% of EUDs organising the majority of consultation events at a central level in both 2022 and 2023.

The overall level of CSO satisfaction with EUD performance at consultation and dialogue events is high:¹⁸ 47 EUDs report CSOs being 'very satisfied', 26 report CSOs being 'mildly satisfied' **with technical arrangements¹⁹ of consultations and dialogue events²⁰**). Regarding the **content of meetings and the opportunities to engage in dialogue**, the satisfaction of CSOs with EUDs is even higher: 60 CSOs are 'very satisfied', 21 'mildly satisfied'.²¹ Even slightly higher than with the before-mentioned content is the **level of satisfaction of CSOs with contributions of EUDs²²** at 83 CSOs: 60 CSOs are 'very satisfied', 23 CSOs 'mildly satisfied'; 12 EUDs do not get feedback from CSOs after meetings.²³

The way forward

The analysis of data from surveys conducted in 2021, 2022, and 2023 reveals a clear upward trend in the quality, breadth, and depth of EUD consultations with CSOs. To build on this progress and further

14 An "ad-hoc" approach refers to consultations with CSOs that are called for when needed to obtain feedback and insights on specific policies, strategies, or programmes, often when decisions have already been made.

15 A "regular" approach entails at least two consultations per year, although not yet strategic or institutionalised as a permanent space for dialogue.

16 "Structured Dialogue" is defined as a permanent or institutionalised space for dialogue with clear Terms of Reference, where a minimum number of consultation sessions take place, the contents and agenda can be discussed together in advance, and there is a regular flow of information among the parties involved.

17 In 2023, EUDs' practices remained consistent with those of 2022, with slight improvements. 6 EUDs shared relevant documents before every consultation event (compared to 3 in 2022), 43 EUDs did so in most cases (compared to 32 in 2022), 39 EUDs occasionally (compared to 45 in 2022), and 7 EUDs never (compared to 20 in 2022). In the planning of consultations, there was no notable advancement compared to the previous year. Similarly, the preparation and holding of consultations saw minimal but interesting progress, with 6 EUDs jointly defining the agenda before every meeting (up from only 1 in 2022), while the majority of EUDs practiced joint agenda-setting only occasionally (53 in 2023, compared to 61 in 2022). Regarding the provision of feedback by EUDs to CSOs on how CSO input has been taken on board, there was a slight increase in the sharing of meeting minutes (38 EUDs in 2023, up from 32 in 2022). However, some EUDs refrain from sharing written feedback or minutes of sensitive meetings to avoid putting CSOs at risk in challenging contexts.

18 The reported satisfaction levels of CSOs regarding consultation and dialogue events are based exclusively on EUD' perceptions, collected through the survey. This survey did not directly gather CSOs' opinions about their consultations and dialogue with EUDs.

19 'Technical arrangements' including general communication; prior notification of date; joint drafting of agenda; accessible/decentralised meeting location; etc.

20 However, 18 EUDs do not get feedback from CSOs after meetings regarding the level of satisfaction with technical arrangements, while 1 EUD reports CSOs being little/not satisfied and 9 EUDs replied NA/I don't know.

21 13 EUDs do not get feedback from CSOs after meetings regarding the level of satisfaction with the content of meetings and the opportunity to engage in dialogue, while 1 EUD reported CSOs being little/not satisfied with the content and 5 EUDs replied NA/I don't know.

22 'Contributions of EUDs' including here, for example, openness to CSOs' concerns; involvement of EUD hierarchy, follow-up actions, etc.

23 Additionally, 1 EUD reported CSOs being little/not satisfied with EUD contributions, 4 EUDs replied NA/I don't know, 1 EUD left the question blank.



enhance civil society's engagement and impact in EU initiatives across partner countries, it is crucial to continue the trend in the coming years. The following recommendations offer a roadmap to deepen and refine these efforts:

On enhancing engagement with CSOs in Global Gateway initiatives:

EUDs are strongly encouraged to adopt a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society within the framework of the Global Gateway strategy. This shift should consider the following:

- a) **Establish regular and strategic dialogue:** Building on the initial engagement in 2023, **EUDs should swiftly establish more regular and strategic dialogue with a broad range of CSO actors involved in GG initiatives.**
- b) **Engage with affected communities:** Engagement with CSOs in GG must involve citizens groups and local communities directly affected by GG projects. This should include tailored approaches at decentralised level.
- c) **Consult women and youth CSOs:** **Women and youth-focused CSOs should be systematically consulted on GG initiatives**, aligning the practices to those of other policy areas.
- d) **Investment in sectoral mapping:** **EUDs should undertake sectoral mapping and analysis of CSOs** relevant to specific Global Gateway initiatives. This will help **generate new insights and knowledge**, enabling **EUDs to identify relevant actors engage to engage in dialogue at both policy and project levels.**
- e) **Context sensitive Dialogue:** EUDs should **facilitate tailored dialogue platforms with CSOs, customised to the specific context and sector of each GG initiative.** These dialogues should be carefully planned, to ensure that CSOs can make meaningful contributions thereby enhancing the accountability, impact, and sustainability of GG initiatives.
- f) **Multi-stakeholders dialogue at policy level:** **At the policy level, dialogue should be multi-stakeholders**, with all relevant actors represented and enabled to participate, contributing to policy and strategy development and monitoring.
- g) **CSOs participation at project level:** **Relevant CSOs should be involved from the inception of GG initiatives**, with specific resources allocated to foster meaningful partnerships. **Their participation should be integrated into all key stages**, from project identification through to implementation and closure. **EUDs should also consider investing in the capacity development of CSOs**, supporting their research, advocacy, and action **to enable informed and independent participation.** This is particularly important for CSOs representing communities and vulnerable groups directly impacted by the project.
- h) **Engagement in "hard" infrastructure projects:** For "hard" infrastructure projects, **CSOs representing communities directly affected should be both informed and empowered to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives** and livelihoods. This includes involvement in investment decisions, Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), as well as in the development, implementation, and monitoring of related management plans.

On improving practices of consultations and dialogue with CSOs around NDICI-Global Europe:

a) **Context-driven approaches:**

Recognising that no single approach suits all situations, EUDs should enhance their efforts to customise CSO engagement based on local contexts and EU-partner country priorities. This tailored



approach should consider factors such as civic space, CSO capacities, challenges, and available resources. It remains crucial to adopt context-specific and thematic-driven strategies.

- b) Diversity and inclusion of local voices:** Building on the progress made over the past three years, EUDs should continue to enhance their efforts to include local grassroots organisations and diverse voices, building on a human rights-based approach, directly affected by EU programmes in their civil society consultations and dialogues. While many EUDs have been engaging with local grassroots CSOs, there is room to broaden this engagement further. Recognising the value of this inclusive approach, EUDs should extend their consultations on the GG to reach more and diverse stakeholders impacted by projects contributing to this. This widening of participation is important for addressing community needs, upholding high human rights, environmental, and social standards, and ultimately ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives.
- c) Refining Structured Dialogue:** Promoting and refining the structured dialogue approach is crucial, ensuring its appropriate application in favourable environments while complementing it with ad-hoc and regular consultations as needed. This strategy allows EUDs to adapt to diverse and evolving relationships with civil society. It strikes a balance between managing an increasing demand of consultations across various policy areas and developing more consistent, meaningful, and strategic engagement with CSOs.
- d) Supporting EUDs in implementation:** Data from 2021 to 2023 highlights obstacles hindering EUDs from enhancing consultations with CSOs and progressing towards more consistent and strategic dialogue, primarily related to capacities and resources. Extending existing and, where necessary, introducing additional mechanisms to support EUDs in the practical implementation of dialogues is crucial, providing tailored guidance, technical assistance, and resources to improve the planning, preparation, facilitation, and follow-up of consultation events.
- e) Peer learning and interconnectedness:** Building on the efforts so far led by INTPA G2, more spaces should be promoted to allow EUDs to exchange best practices and insights gained from engagements, as well as the diverse challenges they encounter. Additional regional and thematic fora for peer learning and knowledge sharing can enable EUDs to adopt more strategic and impactful approaches to civil society dialogue, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.
- f) Enabling engagement with local CSOs:** Continued investment in refining approaches and strengthening the capacities of local CSOs, especially those representing marginalised and discriminated groups, is crucial. Tailoring approaches to these local CSOs, creating safe spaces and modalities to facilitate a diverse and meaningful participation, also offering trainings, resources, and customised support can empower these organisations to engage more effectively in dialogues and contribute meaningfully to policy-making processes, ultimately leading to more equitable and impactful outcomes.



1. Introduction

The EU recognises the significance of civil society's diversity and its multi-faceted role in governance and development. It's commitment to supporting and collaborating with civil society is reflected in numerous EU policy statements and the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, since the publication of the 2012 Communication "[The Roots of Democracy and sustainable development](#)". Furthermore, this commitment is embedded in **the Global Gateway Communication**²⁴, which is a value-driven initiative based on the Union's high social, environmental, fiscal, and labour standards, and strongly underpinned by a human rights-based approach. In particular, the GG principle on good governance and transparency underline that **"those most affected by potential projects must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement."** In the words of the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen:²⁵ *"Civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial partners in the roll out of the Global Gateway, in particular at country level"*.²⁶ Commissioner Urpilainen emphasises the role of EUDs in connecting with local CSOs those 'experts on the ground', establishing a dialogue to feed into the design and implementation of European policies, programmes and projects²⁷. This report offers insights into the coordinated efforts of EU Delegations to cultivate substantive consultations and dialogue with civil society organisations. In doing so, it draws upon recommendations set forth by the OECD-DAC²⁸, CONCORD²⁹, and other international benchmarks.

More specifically, the report examines the practices of EU consultations with CSOs at the country level in 2023, offering both quantitative and qualitative insights, assessing practices based on the principles and policy orientations set in the Lisbon Treaty, the Communication 2012, and other relevant international standards³⁰. As the third iteration of this report, following the previous editions based on data from 2021 and 2022, it provides valuable information on the evolution of consultation and dialogue practices with CSOs over the past three years.³¹ The report highlights good practices and lessons learnt in the different sections, emphasised in blue, along with the main emerging findings. By analysing the progress and challenges in engaging with CSOs, this report aims to inform and guide future efforts to strengthen consultations and dialogue between the EU and civil society in partner countries, ultimately contributing to more effective and accountable development cooperation.

24 Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank The Global Gateway (1.12.2021) available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021JC0030>

25 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_23_1805

26 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_1805

27 Jutta Urpilainen. Commissioner for International Partnerships. Mission letter. 1 December 2019

28 OECD, DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, OECD/LEGAL/5021

29 CONCORD, Building partnerships through meaningful consultation: 7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making, October 2022

30 For example, the study considers the principle to "Leave no one behind", central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, available <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021>

31 The methodology of this assessment is based on an annual survey conducted over three years, along with the support of provided by the RMF to around 20 EUDs to improve their dialogue with CSOs. This approach has offered the INTPA the opportunity to gain a clear insight into the EU consultation & dialogue dynamics within the partner countries, thanks to the consistent responses from 100 or more EUDs over three consecutive years. However, this approach comes with limitations, particularly the reliance on one main source of information, the EUDs through a survey, which does not provide the possibility of verifying the information, delving deeper into certain aspects, as well as the lack of feedback from CSOs themselves.

2. Embracing diversity in civil society



The diversity of CSOs engaged serves as a foundation upon which EUDs are gradually constructing a more inclusive and impactful dialogue with civil society. Expanding on trends from previous years, EUDs have made substantial progress in 2023 by moving beyond development CSOs, engaging with a wide range of local actors, and recognising their valuable contributions to consultations and policy discussions.

In 2023, EUDs **continued to prioritise local organisations** in their **consultations and dialogue with civil society at country level**. **Local CSOs accounted for 82% of civil society participants across all countries**. This underscores the EU's commitment to integrating local actors, and a human-rights based approach, in accordance with the priorities outlined in the 2012 Communication. It also echoes recent trends in development cooperation towards further localisation. Notably, a **significant 50% of these engagements were with grassroots organisations**³², a considerable increase from 21% the previous year. This is a sign that EUDs are becoming aware of the importance of enabling the direct participation of communities and beneficiaries of EU interventions in consultations and dialogue, thereby ensuring relevant feedback and local ownership, in line with the principle to “Leave no one behind”. This move towards more community-level, bottom-up approaches, suggests a shift to deepen impact at the local community level, thereby fostering more sustainable and relevant development outcomes.

Furthermore, **there is a sustained commitment to gender equality and youth empowerment**, with women's and youth organisations comprising 15% and 13% of CSOs engaged in consultations and dialogue, respectively. The consistent involvement **with networks and coalitions** (12%) is pivotal for broadening influence and coordination across civil society. Additionally, the growing presence of actors such as labour unions and private sector organisations in 2023 marks a diversification in EU civil society engagement, aligning with broader socio-economic development goals, also in the framework of GG initiatives.

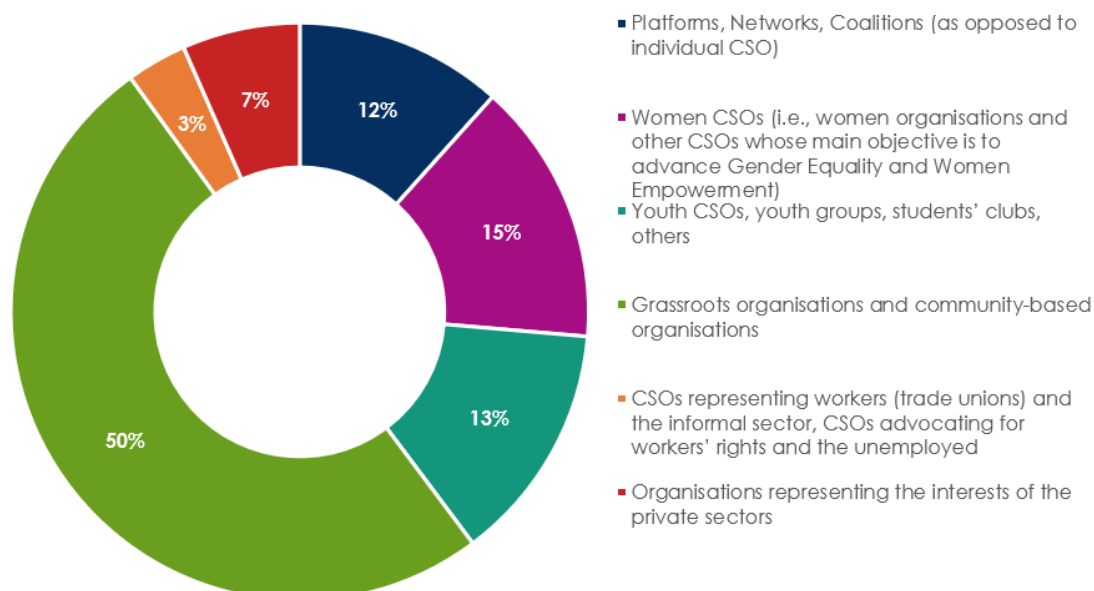


Figure 1: Types of local CSOs consulted by EUDs in 2023

32 See footnotes 11 and 12.



CSOs consulted by EUDs are active on a wide range of issues (from climate change, natural resources, and extractive industries within the energy supply chains, to labour rights, transparency and accountability, prevention of corruption, governance and human rights, gender equality and youth). EUDs are tapping into such expertise, consulting them on a broad spectrum of thematic areas relevant to their MIPs, GG roll-out and TEIs. Organisations active in democratic governance and human rights continue to be recognised as key partners in consultations, with 75% of them reported as making strong contributions in 2023, up from 65% in 2022. CSOs involved in climate change, natural resources, and environmental sectors have also shown significant influence, with nearly 50% regarded as having been highly effective in shaping EU policies in 2023 — a notable rise from 36% in 2021. Similarly, organisations focusing on women’s and youth issues have seen marked improvements, with strong contributions³³ from women’s organisations rising from 43% in 2021 to nearly 75% in 2023.

Economic development-focused CSOs displayed a diverse range of contributions, from strong to low. A significant portion have not yet been consulted, indicating potential for deeper consultations. This sector has gradually improved, with strong contributions increasing from 27% in 2021 to 33% in 2023. Similarly, organisations focusing on rural development reported a 20% strong contribution rate, also revealing notable potential for improvements.

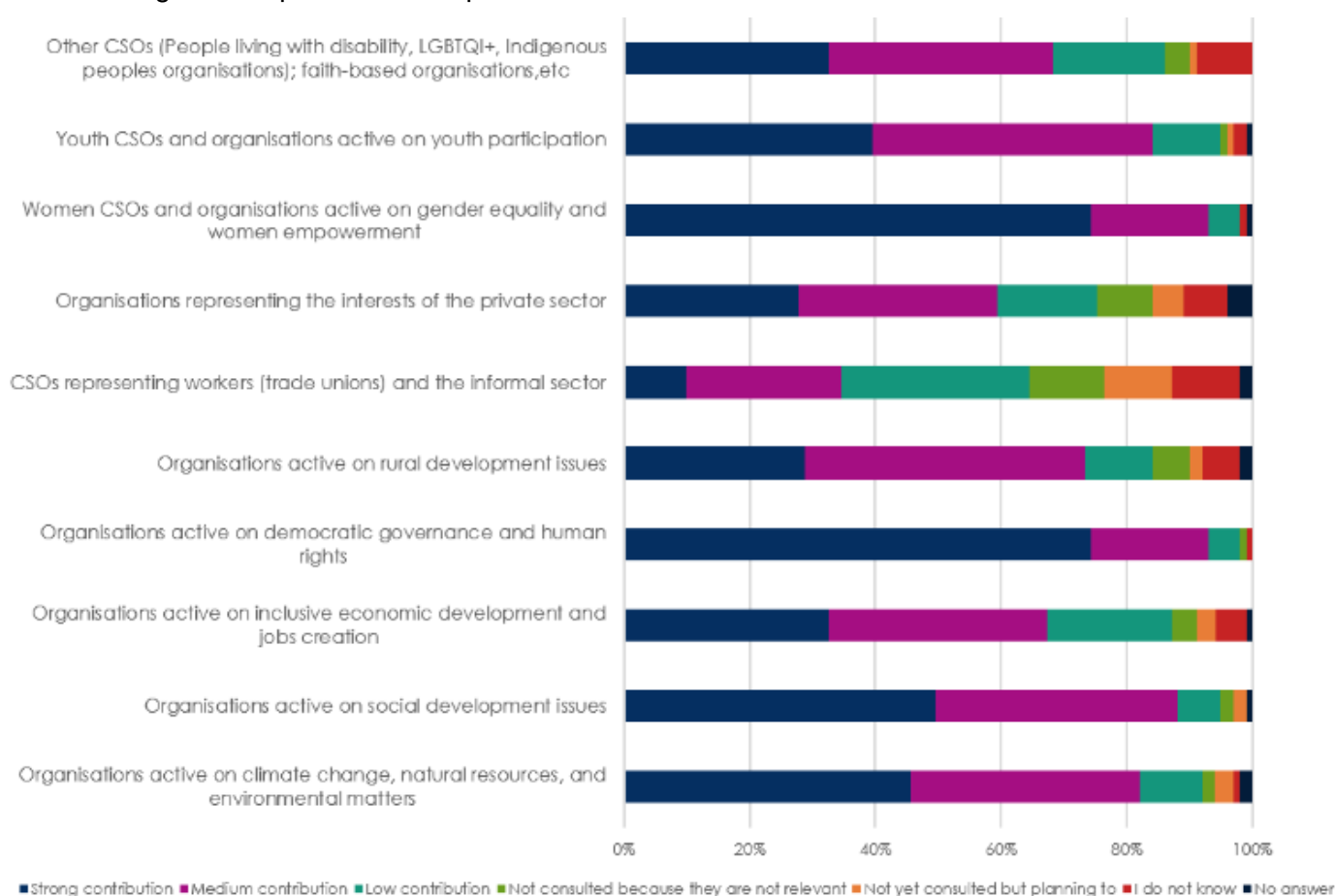


Figure 2: Perceived contributions (strong, medium, low) by types of CSOs in consultations & dialogue

³³ A 'strong contribution' is here defined as knowledgeable about the issues, well-structured and meaningful interventions during the consultations. A 'medium contribution' is here defined as some knowledge and awareness about the issues, interesting interventions during the consultations. A 'low contribution' is here defined as aware of the issues, punctual interventions during the consultations. See also the survey in the annex.



A closer examination of the **civil society actors consulted on the NDICI - Global Europe programmes in 2023** reveals a wide range of engagement. Notably, 91 EUDs collaborated with women's CSOs, while 81 EUDs sought input from youth-focused CSOs. Additionally, a substantial number of EUDs engaged with thematic CSOs specialised on specific issues, such as democratic governance and human rights (91 EUDs), climate change and natural resources (87 EUDs), social development (91 EUDs), economic development (73 EUDs), and rural development (73 EUDs). Interestingly, 67 EUDs consulted with organisations representing private sector interests, including private sector associations and chambers of commerce, while 42 EUDs engaged with trade unions.

The data highlights a consistent improvement in CSO engagement across key sectors from 2021 to 2023, demonstrating a commitment to incorporating a wide range of civil society actors into EU external relations and policymaking. However, CSO contributions are not equally strong across all regions and sectors. As the diversity of CSO involvement increases, EUDs must adapt to effectively leverage this diversity, especially in relation to EU thematic priorities. This requires engaging with relevant civil society actors based on the specific area of focus.

For example, when addressing energy and green transitions, EUDs should consult with environmental youth movements, indigenous groups, and climate change CSOs, as well as think tanks and academia actively researching on relevant matters. Similarly, for initiatives related to decent labour and equal opportunities, EUDs should engage with trade unions, informal sector organisations, unemployed youth, and women's groups. In the context of digitalisation and digital rights, EUDs should consult with independent media outlets, investigative journalists, freedom of information and speech advocates, consumers associations, and human rights groups.

It is essential for EUDs to continue to deepen their engagement with CSOs with expertise and experience in the specific thematic priorities being addressed. Many EUDs are already moving in this direction, particularly those consistently engaging CSOs on MIP priority areas and those adopting a more co-created approach to consultations and dialogue with CSOs (see sections below).

3. Amplifying women and youth voices



EU consultations have become increasingly inclusive in terms of gender and age, with a growing number of women's and youth organisations being invited to express their views and concerns. Notably, these organisations are not only being given a platform to voice their perspectives but are also making significant and valuable contributions to the consultation process.

In 2023, out of the 101 surveyed EUDs, **99 confirmed having consulted with women's organisations (up from 94 EUDs in 2021)** and **96 with youth organisations (up from 85 EUDs in 2021)**, in one or several of the EU programmatic areas. Considering all EUDs collectively, 15% of CSOs consulted in 2023 were women's CSOs (up from 14% in 2021), while 13% were **youth CSOs** (almost double, up from 7% in 2021). Overall contributions from women's organisations were deemed highly relevant by 75% of the surveyed EUDs, whilst in the case of youth organisations, it was less than 40%.

Women's and youth organisations are being increasingly consulted across EU priority areas, including the GG, TEI, and the NDICI-Global Europe actions at the country level. This is consistent with a trend towards including relevant, vulnerable groups in consultations and dialogue. In 2023, women's organisations were consulted in 40 countries on the GG, with 21 EUDs considering their contributions to be highly relevant. Similarly, youth organisations were consulted in 38 countries on the GG, with 17 EUDs rating their contributions highly relevant.

Regarding NDICI-Global Europe (encompassing the MIP, thematic programmes, and rapid response measures), women's CSOs were engaged in consultations in 91 countries, with 76 of EUDs considering their contributions to be highly relevant. Youth CSOs were consulted in 81 countries, and 56 EUDs deemed their contributions to be highly relevant.



EUDs have established regular, effective, and meaningful dialogue with women's CSOs over time, in accordance with the priorities of the GAP III. Additionally, EUDs have been gradually overcoming initial challenges identified in 2021 when engaging with youth organisations, such as communication gaps, generational divides, and mistrust.

However, the relatively lower perceived impact of contributions from youth organisations indicates that there are still opportunities for improving engagement to better connect the EU with younger generations. EUDs should continue to strengthen their efforts in involving CSOs focused on youth and ensuring that their contributions are valued and incorporated into decision-making processes. This can be achieved through targeted outreach, capacity building, and creating more inclusive platforms for dialogue and collaboration.

In **Mauritania**, the EUD facilitated in 2023 a wide range of consultations, emphasising critical societal issues while engaging significantly with women and youth. Topics such as "Security, Peace, and Conflict Prevention" were addressed, with a particular focus on involving youth in these discussions. Health consultations prioritised women's rights, aiming to prevent violence against women and ensuring access to comprehensive healthcare services, including psychosocial, legal, administrative, and economic support. In the realms of "Governance and Gender," there was a strong emphasis on promoting women's autonomy and leadership. Consultations around education focused on continuous access for girls and employment opportunities, reinforcing the EU's commitment to gender equality and youth empowerment. Environmental discussions also engaged the youth in green economy and sustainable development topics, further integrating young people into critical conversations about their future.

Engagement with youth through youth advisory structures³⁴ has increased and deepened. In 2023, 20 EUDs reported having such an operational structure, compared to 14 in 2022 and 8 in 2021. Nine EUDs are in the process of setting up a youth advisory structure, while 41 plan to establish one within the next 12 months. However, 23 EUDs do not have such a structure or plans to create one, and 8 EUDs did not answer the question or deemed it inapplicable to their circumstances.

The EUD in Nigeria has identified several key achievements of its Youth Sounding Board:

- The Board provided five advisory notes to the EUD during the programme formulation and design phases.
- The Board supported the EUD's implementing partner (GCERF) in expanding the SARVE II projects in Katsina state to include youth groups and CSOs.
- Despite the Twitter ban, the Youth Sounding Board raised awareness on actions that are inherently sexual and gender-based violations but are normalised in the Nigerian context through the #Never-Okay campaign, generating one million organic impressions on Twitter in just two days.
- The Board organised the Naija Talk Villa, a virtual town hall meeting for policy recommendations, which was attended by over 100 CSOs and youth stakeholders in Nigeria.
- The Board also organised four virtual Erasmus Mundus scholarship information sessions.

³⁴ Youth advisory structures are groups of young people that play an advisory role to EUDs and help make EU action more participatory, relevant, and effective for young people in EU partner countries. They hold different setting and names, such as Youth Sounding Board Youth Forum, Youth Advisory Panel, Youth & Engaged (from the French name "Jeunes & Engagés"), etc.



4. Global Gateway



The engagement of CSOs in GG initiatives occurred in 69 EUDs, particularly in the climate and energy sector. CSOs actively involved in issues directly related to GG initiatives, as well as private sector organisations, are increasingly taking part in these consultations. However, further efforts are necessary to transition towards more regular, meaningful, and strategic consultations, ensuring the inclusion of women and youth organisations, and particularly organisations representing citizens' groups and communities directly impacted by initiatives and projects contributing to GG.

Out of 101 EUDs, 69 indicated to have consulted with CSOs (62 with an ad-hoc approach, seven (7) with regular consultations), while 21 EUDs did not conduct any consultations on GG and, for 11 EUDs, the information is not available.

Looking at consultations with CSOs around GG priority sectors, there are significant variations in engagement levels and approaches.³⁵ The **climate and energy sector demonstrates extensive engagement**, reflecting the EU's strategic focus on climate change and the transition to green energy (56% of all GG Flagship in INTPA countries in 2023 were on the climate and energy sector³⁶).³⁷ A total of 50 EUDs have informed CSOs about related initiatives, with 29 involving CSOs during the design stage and 12 continuing this involvement through the follow-up phase. Similarly, the **education and research sector** also shows a comprehensive approach, with 28 EUDs keeping CSOs informed and 20 involving them in the design stage, highlighting an inclusive approach to project development.

In the **digital sector**, 39 EUDs have kept CSOs informed about activities, but fewer interactions were noted in the design (13 EUDs) and follow-up (six (6) EUDs) stages, indicating a potential area for improvement. A significant number of EUDs (56) reported having no GG initiative in the digital sector, suggesting a focus on other areas or varying stages of project development. The same trend applies to the **health sector**, which is marked by the least reported initiatives, with 72 EUDs indicating the absence of projects. Where engagement exists, it remains moderate, with 22 EUDs providing information to CSOs, 12 involving them in the design, and 6 in the follow-up phases. Finally, the **transport sector** exhibits the lowest level of CSO engagement across all stages, with fewer EUDs involving CSOs in the design (11 EUDs) and follow-up stages (three (3)), possibly also due to low level of CSO activities in this area. Additionally, 29 EUDs informed CSOs of the GG initiatives, while 59 EUDs reported no GG initiatives in the sector. The lower level of engagement between EUDs and CSOs in sectors outside of climate and energy could also be attributed to the limited number of GG projects in these areas. Of all GG flagship projects in INTPA countries, 19% were in the transport sector, 12% in digital, 8% in health, and only 3% in education³⁸.

In the GG flagship in education in Nepal, CSOs are involved at several levels. The EU employs a sector-wide approach to support education, incorporating a €50 million budget support as part of the third generation of budget support. This initiative is complemented by contributions from other donors, including UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. CSOs are then mainstreamed using an "around the budget" strategy, ensuring their involvement at all levels. CSOs participate actively in the sector coordination group, engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy for budget allocation at the local level. Additionally, the involvement of the Youth Sounding Board has brought in fresh perspectives to the EUD and ensured that youth voices are also part of the dialogue. The involvement of CSOs also extends to the local level, where CSOs are called to address, in close coordination with

³⁵ The following analysis is based on the survey responses, which did not include the specific number of GG-related projects undertaken in each country.

³⁶ Source: INTPA D1

³⁷ A few EUDs are opening up spaces for consultations and dialogue with CSOs specifically on issues related to the energy transition, particularly those EUDs in countries where the EU has established Critical Raw Materials Partnerships.

³⁸ Source: INTPA D1



local governments (Palikas), more sensitive and political issues such as caste and ethnicity-based discrimination, gender equality, and the integration of children with disabilities. The funding of CSOs to engage in policy dialogue and complementarity actions comes from a funding envelope, which does not require prior government approval, facilitating more direct and flexible support. All in all, this inclusive multi-layered strategy ensures that civil society voices are integral to the monitoring of reforms and the implementation of complementary actions at local level.

With regards to the types of CSOs involved in GG consultations, **CSOs with specific expertise related to GG projects have been consulted by 44 EUDs**, with 28 EUDs considering their contributions impactful, indicating that these organisations are considered highly important stakeholders within their specific domains. While 30 EUDs have not yet consulted thematic CSOs, they have plans to involve them in future dialogues.

Private sector organisations demonstrate relatively strong engagement, with 46 EUDs actively consulting them, and 27 EUDs considering their involvement highly relevant to the issues at stake. This underscores the significant role the private sector plays in shaping GG projects.

Youth and women's civil society organisations were consulted on GG initiatives by 38 and 40 EUDs, respectively, compared to 96 and 99 in other policy areas. These figures highlight opportunities to further enhance the active participation of youth and women in GG projects, ensuring their voices are more prominently included in future consultations.

Additionally, **organisations representing citizen groups and communities directly impacted by GG projects** have been consulted by 24 EUDs. Over half of the EUDs (53) have yet to involve these groups in consultations, indicating a clear opportunity for improvement. The Joint Communication on GG emphasises the importance of ensuring that *“those most affected by potential projects must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement.”* This calls for a more direct and systematic engagement with affected communities, potentially through decentralised approaches, to ensure their voices are fully heard.

CSOs representing workers and the informal sector were consulted by 20 EUDs, while 56 EUDs did not yet consult them, among which 35 EUDs plan to include them in the future. This suggests recognition of the importance of labour organisations in GG initiatives and potential for enhanced future collaboration.

In sum, the data indicates **the efforts made by EUDs in engaging with different types of CSOs in the consultation processes of GG initiatives**. While certain **thematic CSOs and those representing the private sector are already well-integrated** into these consultations, **CSOs representing local communities directly affected by GG projects**, as well as trade unions, youth and women CSOs, and other CSOs representing underrepresented groups **are not yet systematically involved in GG initiatives**, despite their active participation in other programmatic areas.

This disparity is significant because **the contributions of affected communities and citizens groups are crucial for the success of GG projects**, particularly from a human rights-based perspective. Their unique perspectives, local knowledge, and understanding of the specific needs and challenges are invaluable in ensuring that GG initiatives are inclusive, effective, and sustainable in line with the principles of the Joint Communication. By actively engaging CSOs that represent local communities and vulnerable groups in dialogue around GG projects, EUDs can foster a more inclusive and participatory culture, significantly enhancing the impact and long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

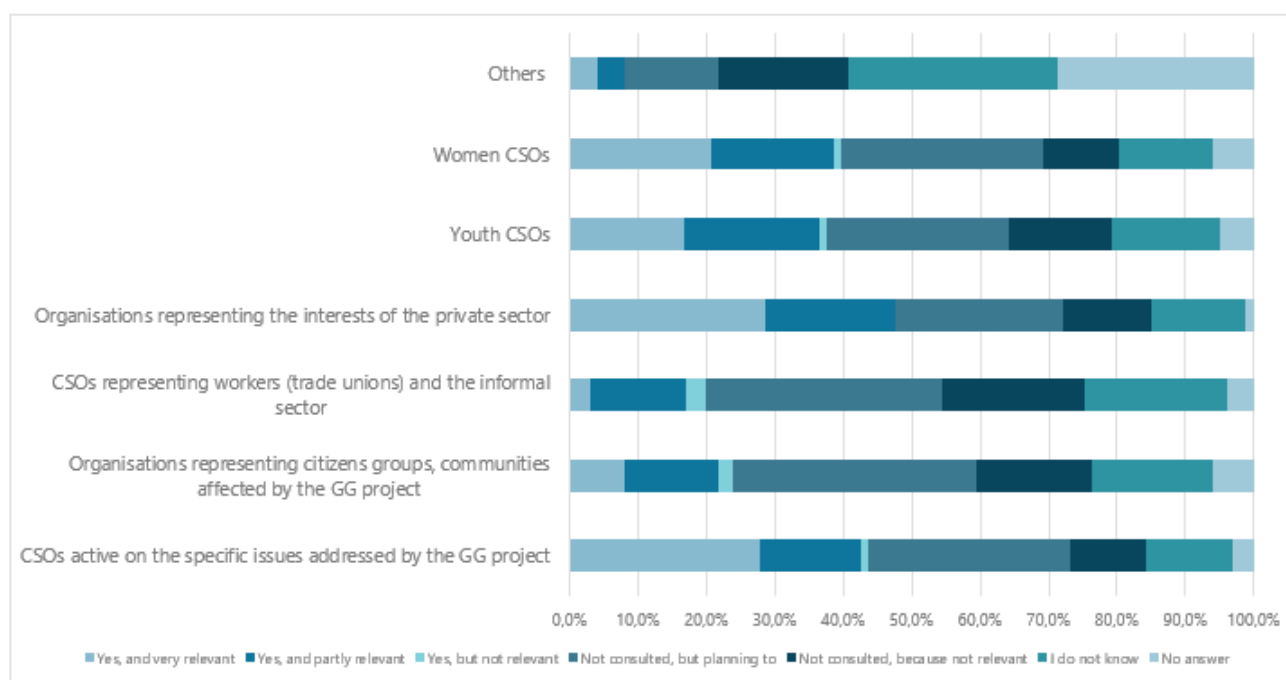


Figure 3: Perceived relevance of CSOs contributions to GG initiatives

Some qualitative notes about CS engagement across GG initiatives

- **Structured and inclusive dialogue:** Several EUDs, among them Kenya and the Dominican Republic, have dedicated efforts to create Structured Dialogue platforms, ensuring that a range of CSOs are included from the planning stage to the implementation and follow-up of initiatives and projects contributing to GG. These platforms aim to provide consistent and inclusive environments for civil society to contribute meaningfully to the discussions.
- **Local-level engagement:** Several EUDs, such as those in Somalia and Eswatini, stress the importance of aligning GG projects with local needs and priorities, indicating an approach that values grassroots input and local contexts.
- **Diverse and specialised consultations:** EUDs in Peru and the Barbados and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) region highlight the value of engaging with CSOs across various sectors, including water, sanitation, and regional development. This suggests a move toward more diversified and specialised consultations that address the distinct aspects of GG projects.
- **Private sector collaboration:** Initiatives in Argentina and Chile show a move toward integrating private sector interests and expertise in GG projects, particularly those that promote green technologies (lithium and green hydrogen) and sustainable practices.
- **Engagement despite challenges:** Despite logistical challenges, in countries like India, EUDs have made significant efforts to include a diverse set of CSOs in discussions, showcasing a commitment to stakeholder engagement regardless of potential obstacles.
- **Technical assistance and knowledge sharing:** Bolivia's initiative to develop technical assistance for CSO integration and knowledge sharing stands out as a proactive measure to empower civil society actors and enhance their capacity to engage with GG projects.
- **Leveraging international forums:** Mozambique's use of the Mozambique-EU GG Investment Forum exemplifies how international events can be leveraged to involve CSOs and link GG objectives with civil society activities.

5. Consulting CSOs on TEIs



In 2023, 81 EUDs engaged with CSOs on TEI, either through consultations or information sessions, representing a substantial 20% increase compared to 2022. The expansion of consultations with CSOs was particularly remarkable in the areas of green alliances and human development, accompanied by a growing involvement in the implementation and monitoring of the TEIs.

This section refers to consultations with CSOs on TEIs at various stages of the initiatives and across the thematic areas.

In 2023, 58 EUDs engaged in consultations with CSOs regarding their TEIs, demonstrating a slight increase from 52 EUDs in 2022. The number of EUDs opting to solely inform CSOs about TEIs rose notably from 8 EUDs in 2022 to 23 in 2023. Several EUDs (20) did not engage with CSOs on TEIs or the information was reported as unavailable and/or the question was deemed inapplicable. Of note, this number was significantly lower than in 2022, when 40 EUDs said they neither consulted with nor informed CSOs about TEIs.

A closer examination of the engagement across the TEI cycle³⁹ reveals that **a small group of nine (9) EUDs⁴⁰** (up from seven (7) in 2022) **are consistently engaging with CSOs across the three core steps of formulation, implementation, and follow-up and steering of the TEIs**, which is considered the desirable approach. Breaking down the engagement by step, 34 EUDs consulted CSOs during the formulation of the TEI (35 in 2022), 28 EUDs during the implementation (up from 26 in 2022), and 16 EUDs during the follow-up (up from 11 in 2022, monitoring, or as part of Steering Committees and similar structures). Additionally, 26 EUDs reported having consulted with CSOs in other ways, while 56 EUDs informed CSOs about their TEIs. EUDs are exhibiting **tangible progress in involving CSOs during the implementation and monitoring of TEIs**, as well as in other ways, with the number of EUDs engaging CSOs increasing from 49 in 2022 to 70 in 2023.

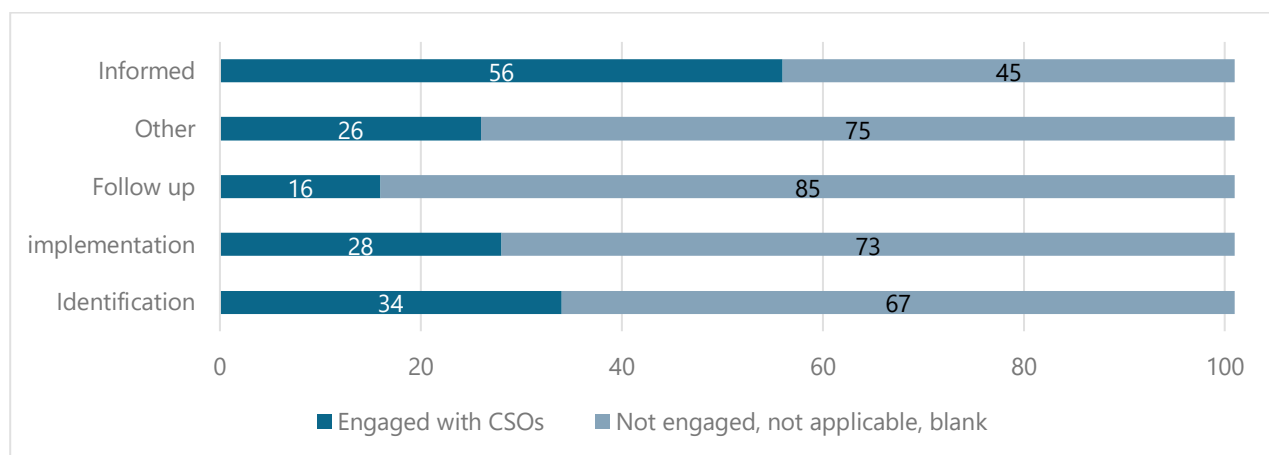


Figure 4: EUDs having engaged with CSOs on TEIs across the TEI cycle in 2023

*"In **Bangladesh**, the EUD and the co-chair of the **TEI Sweden** have started engaging with CSOs and leveraging access to government entities in the area of green energy transition (and vice-versa)." (EUD Bangladesh)*

*"In **Togo**, in the framework of a **TEI project** on support to entrepreneurship ecosystem development, the integration of tripartite dialogues proved to be essential to identify key activities for the project;"*

³⁹TEIs are at different stages, with some still in the conceptualisation phase, while approximately half are progressing towards implementation. The reasons for the varying pace of TEIs are diverse, with one being that some TEIs are built on pre-existing or ongoing programmes of the EU and member states, allowing for quicker operationalization (ECPDM, 2022).

⁴⁰ The 9 EUDs are: Bangladesh, Comoros, Laos, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Uganda.



providing a setting for such dialogue has been identified as an activity to continue by the project as well, especially at decentralised level." (EUD Togo)

From a thematic perspective, information sessions and consultations were organised on Green Deals (67 EUDs), followed by alliances for sustainable growth and jobs (36 EUDs), governance (39 EUDs), and human development (48 EUDs). Fewer consultations were observed in other domains such as digital and science, technology, and innovation (STI) alliances (24 EUDs), and migration partnerships (19 EUDs).

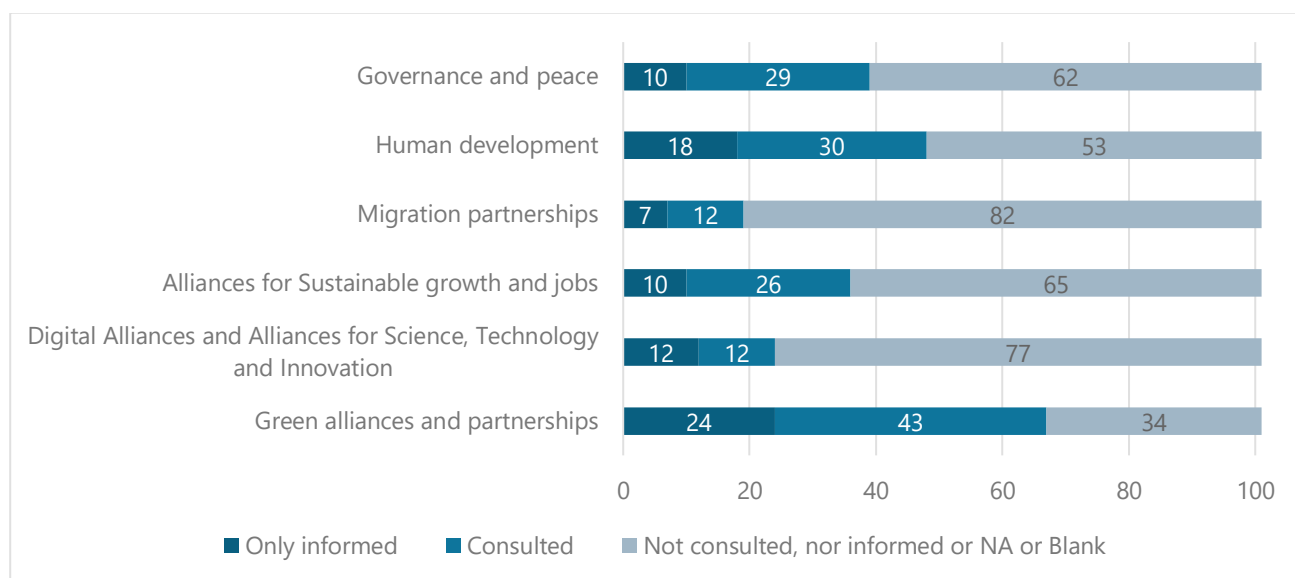


Figure 5: EUDs having consulted with CSOs on TEIs by sector in 2023

In 2023, engagement with CSOs increased across most priority areas, with notable growth in green alliances and human development. The number of EUDs that either consulted or informed CSOs about their TEIs in the green alliances sector rose from 50 in 2022 to 67 in 2023. Similarly, in the human development sector, the number of EUDs engaging with CSOs increased from 32 in 2022 to 48 in 2023. However, the alliances for sustainable growth and jobs sector experienced a slight decrease in engagement, with the number of EUDs involving CSOs dropping from 39 in 2022 to 36 in 2023.

To conclude, there is an uptick in CSO participation at different stages of the TEI cycle, but a significant proportion of EUDs still do not consult with CSOs consistently throughout the process. This highlights the need for enhanced ongoing CSO involvement across all TEI stages to ensure greater transparency and accountability in decision-making.

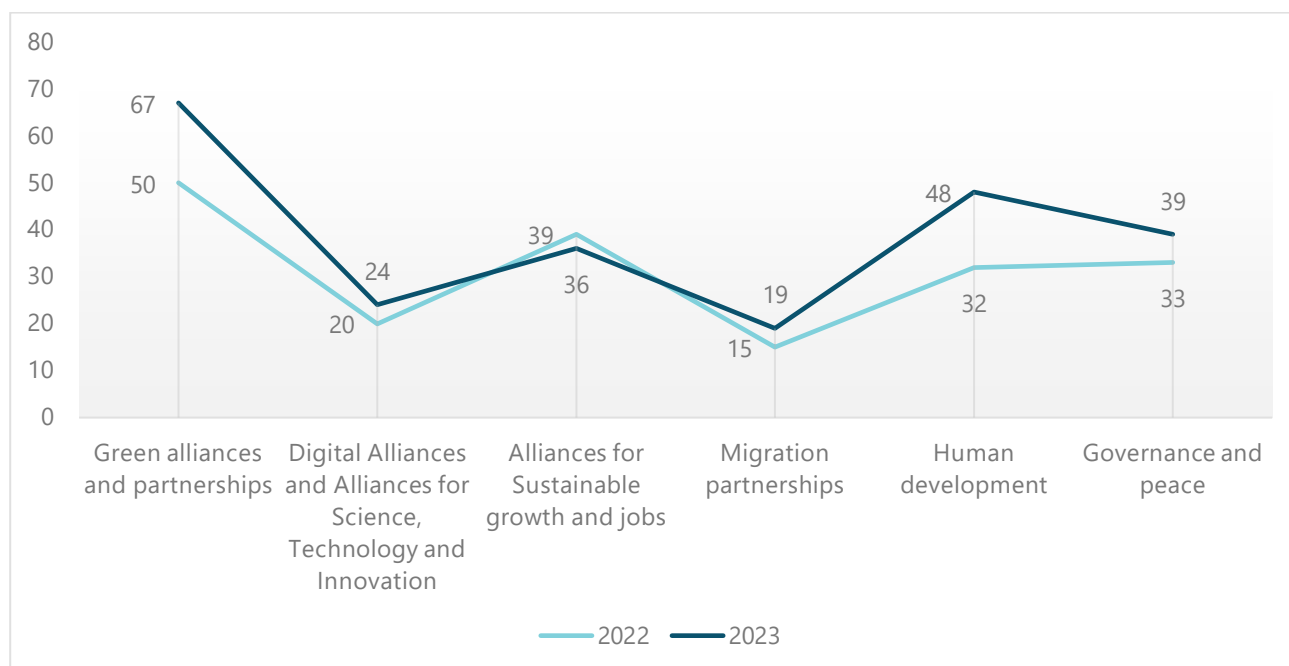


Figure 6: EUDs having consulted with CSOs on TEIs by thematic area in 2022 and 2023

6. Consulting with CSOs on actions funded at country level by the NDICI-Global Europe⁴¹



Since 2021, consultations with CSOs on the NDICI-Global Europe at the country level have steadily improved, taking place in 92 countries, spanning all thematic areas, and involving a diverse range of civil society actors. However, further efforts are necessary in the areas of digital and STI alliances and migration partnerships, where engagement remains low and is declining.

In 2023, **92 EUDs** consulted with CSOs around the formulation and/or implementation of country-level actions under NDICI-Global Europe funded either by the country or regional MIP, the thematic programme country allocations, or rapid response measures. This data confirms a **positive trend compared to 2021 and 2022, when consultations between EUDs and CSOs happened in 58 and 85 countries respectively.**

Consultations with CSOs were conducted across all thematic areas in the definition of the AAP, the identification and implementation of actions, and during the Mid-Term Review (MTR). The consultations confirmed that governance and human development are the areas with the highest level of CSO engagement, followed by green alliances and sustainable growth and jobs. Comparatively, there is less engagement on issues related to migration, digital initiatives, and STI alliances. **The high level of consultations with CSOs during the formulation of the AAP indicates that this process has become an important opportunity for EUDs to gather feedback from CSOs.** This well-established practice also contributed to the MTR consultations, held in 2023, which were often integrated into existing spaces of dialogue with CSOs (i.e. Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Nepal, Togo, Uganda, among others).

⁴¹ This section covers EUDs consultations with CSOs on NDICI-Global Europe actions at country level, encompassing the MIP, the thematic programmes, and the rapid response measures. It is worth noting that some of these actions might also be contributing/ part of GG initiatives.

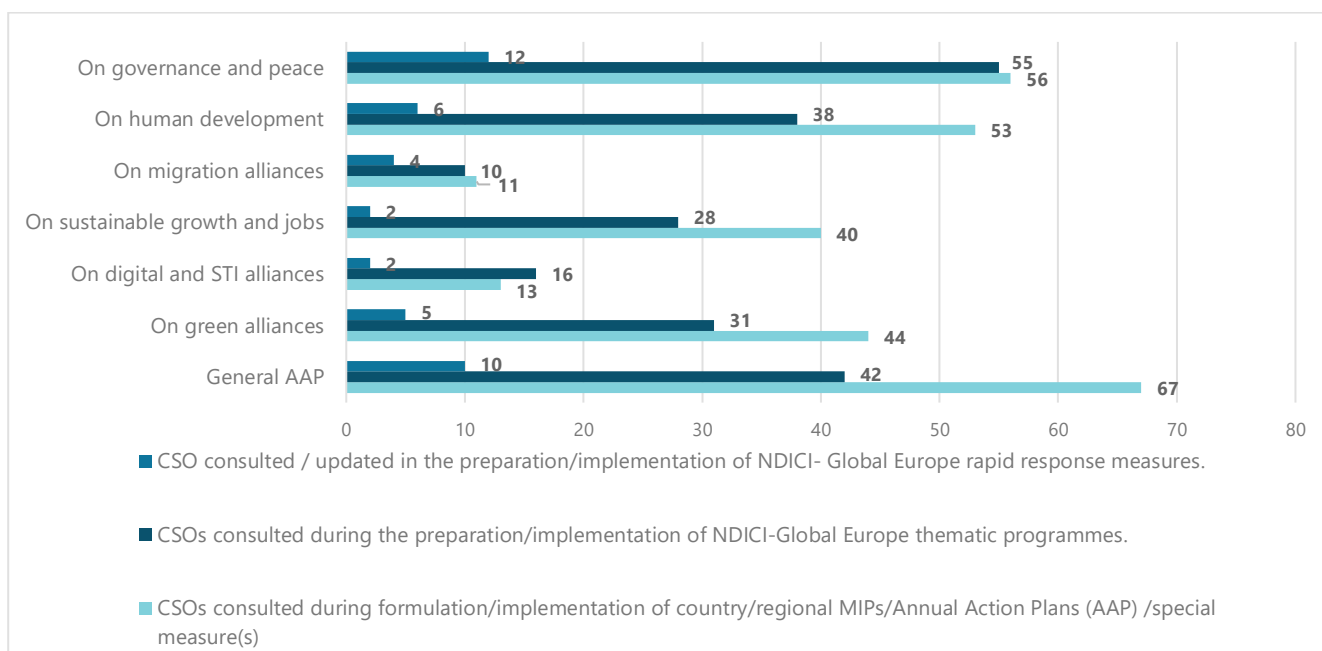


Figure 7: EUDs having consulted with CSOs on NDICI-Global Europe actions (MIP, Thematic programme, Rapid responses measures) by thematic area in 2023

Compared to 2022, **consultations with CSOs around the MIP saw a significant increase in 2023**, with the number of countries involved rising from 61 to 79. In contrast, consultations related to thematic programmes remained relatively stable, with a slight increase from 69 countries in 2022 to 70 in 2023. Similarly, consultations concerning rapid response measures saw a minor uptick, from 15 countries in 2022 up to 18 in 2023.

Looking at the thematic areas, consultations with CSOs show a similar pattern in 2023 compared to 2022, with an increase around human development (from 64 to 74) and governance (from 78 to 84) issues and a slight decrease around green alliances (from 58 to 56), sustainable growth and jobs (from 58 to 51), digital and STI alliances (from 29 to 25) and migration partnerships (from 31 to 23). Consultations with CSOs during the elaboration of the AAP showed a steady increase, passing from 35 countries in 2021, 67 in 2022 and 77 in 2023.

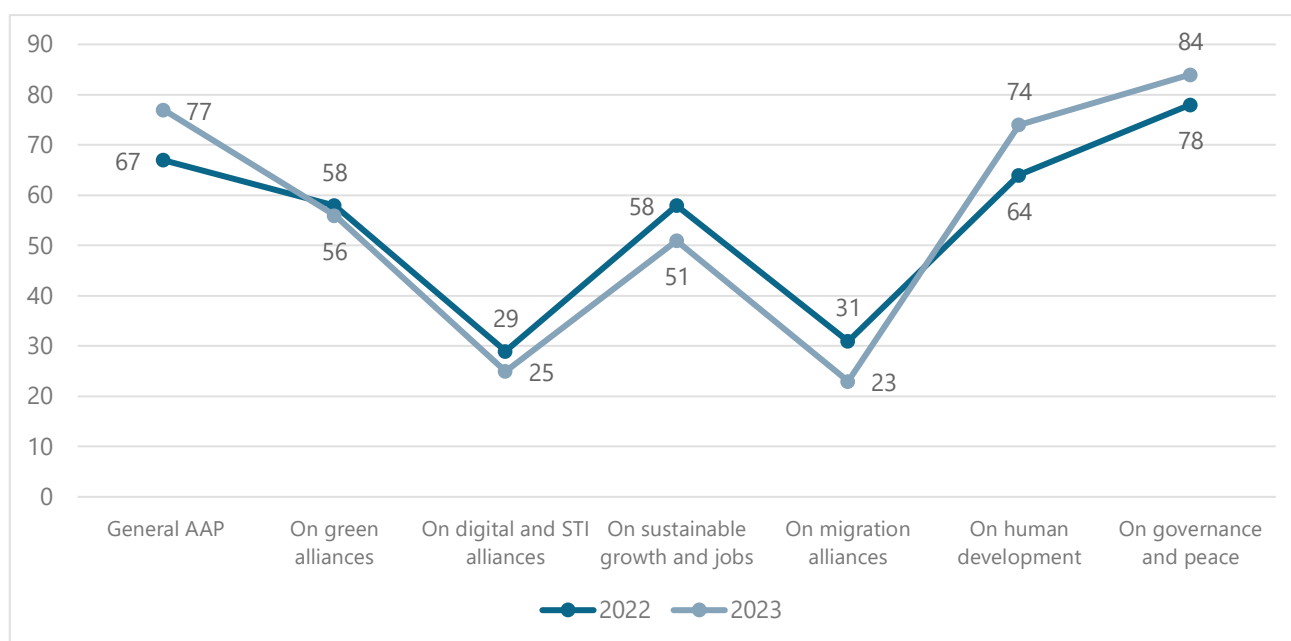


Figure 8: EUDs consultations with CSOs on NDICI-Global Europe actions at country level by thematic areas in 2022 and 2023



Finally, an analysis of the types of CSOs consulted reveals that **EUDs are increasingly engaging with youth and women’s CSOs as well as thematic CSOs**. The number of EUDs consulting thematic CSOs has steadily grown, from 78 in 2021 to 89 in 2022, and reaching 94 in 2023. Moreover, thematic CSOs are becoming increasingly relevant to the content of the dialogue. In 2022, 72 EUDs considered thematic CSOs to be very relevant, with this number increasing to 84 EUDs in 2023.

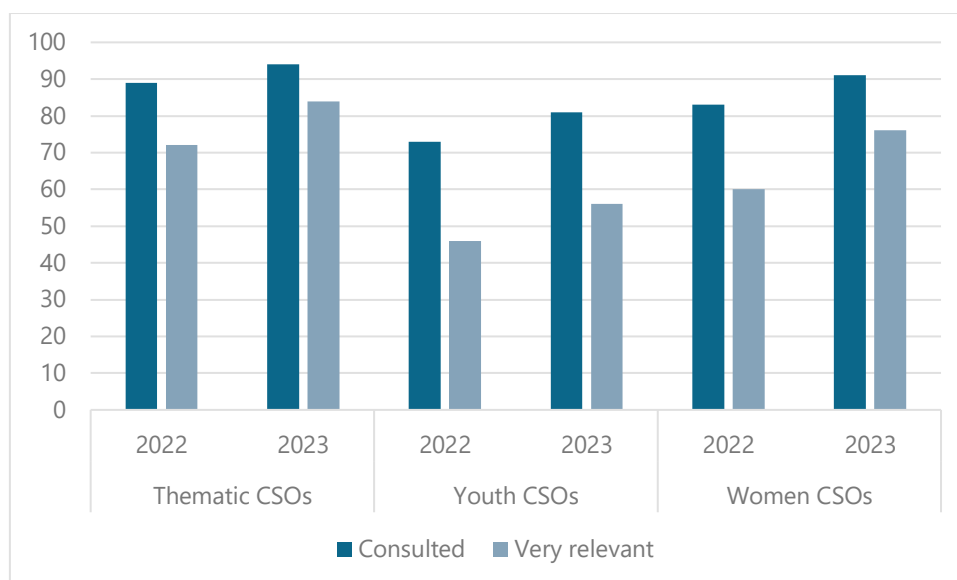


Figure 9: Types and relevance of CSOs consulted by EUDs on NDICI-Global Europe at country level in 2022 and 2023

7. Enhancing impact through civil society engagement



Solid evidence of three years demonstrates that EUDs’ consultations and dialogue with civil society improve the country ownership, effectiveness and accountability of EU strategies and policies in INTPA countries. Additionally, these interactions enhance the understanding of and relations with CSOs while also strengthening their capacities.⁴²

A total of 81 EUDs reported positive impacts – such as changes in strategy, policy, relations, capacities, or other areas – which can be attributed to consultations and dialogue with CSOs.

This marks a substantial improvement compared to previous years, with 73 EUDs in 2022 and just over 50 EUDs in 2021 expressing confidence that consultations had a tangible impact on the policies, strategies, and programmes they aimed to influence⁴³.

The consistent rise in reports from EUDs highlighting tangible impacts underscores the growing recognition of the critical role that CSO consultations play in informing and shaping EU policy decisions and strategies. These consultations are becoming increasingly central to EU policymaking in partner countries, moving beyond a tokenistic approach. This shift reflects the evolving relationship with CSOs, who are now seen more as key partners in the policy-shaping process.

⁴² Engaging in dialogue with EU is an opportunity for CSOs to improve their capacities throughout the process of preparing, participating in and following up on the dialogue events. CSOs benefit in many ways, among which: a) improved access to information and insights into EU policy, instruments, and modalities; b) enhanced advocacy, communication, and coordination among CSOs; c) enhanced influence on policy, self-confidence, and legitimacy as development actors as they engage with EUDs at high level.

⁴³ The number of EUDs observing no or only negligible changes resulting from consultations has fluctuated slightly, with 12 EUDs reporting this in 2023, 9 EUDs in 2022, and 18 EUDs in 2021.



The **changes observed by EUDs as a result of the consultations and dialogue with CSOs** can broadly be clustered into four spheres within EU decision-making: a) informing and influencing EU policy and strategy in partner countries; b) informing and shaping EU funding decisions in partner countries; c) influencing partner government's policies and interactions between CSOs and partner governments; and d) enhancing CSOs' capacities, sustainability, and their alliance-building efforts. Despite the data limitations, which do not allow for an impact assessment, what follows are some testimonials offered by the EUDs.

a. Informing and influencing EU policy & strategy in partner countries.

"Change is rather related to having more structured dialogue with CSOs in our key areas of intervention. An example is the focus on the Delegation's work on FGM [female genital mutilation] where there have been many more interactive discussions, high level events and meetings. CSOs are organising and contributing to these events." (EUD Kenya)

"To improve EU dialogue with national authorities [...] it has been crucial to consult with entities such as traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, human rights defenders, youth and women networks, or national CSOs combating GBV [gender-based violence] and harmful practices." (EUD Sierra Leone)

"Consultations and dialogue with CSOs have led to moderate yet significant adjustments in our approach, particularly in addressing environmental challenges and promoting gender equality. A notable example includes our collaborative efforts to tackle the sargassum seaweed influx, which has been detrimental to marine ecosystems and local livelihoods." (EUD Dominican Republic)

b. Informing and shaping EU funding decisions in partner countries.

"CSOs communicated their inability to afford 10% co-financing, thus the EUD ensured that calls for proposals reduced the request to 5%. CSOs also informed that smaller entities were unable to apply to the EU because they could not afford any co-financing, thus the EUD ensured sub-granting was mandatory for some calls." (EUD Jamaica)

"Through previous consultations, the Delegation was receiving complaints from local organisations, that when it comes to funding opportunities, the delegation favours intentional organisation[s] [...]. These concerns were discussed internally and some of the conditions for the call for proposal were revised in 2022. For example, there was a condition imposed [...] limiting local organisations to be lead applicants because of the capacity issues. These criteria were discriminatory and were removed from the guidelines, as a result, we received very good proposals from local CSOs, which we awarded the grants." (EUD Tanzania)

c. Influencing partner government's policies and interactions between CSOs and partner governments.

"The consultations emphasise the importance of dialogue and engagement with various stakeholders, including government, and some CSOs are beginning to reconsider their perpetual confrontational approach towards government and embracing the idea of meaningful engagement whenever necessary whilst maintaining their watchdog role and independence." (EUD Zimbabwe)

"For example, in our current consultation with youth, the Delegation was able to support two bills that were presented in Parliament. For this, the Delegation signed a partnership with the Parliament of Colombia to provide direct insights from CSO's and youth groups consulted through the EU CSO Roadmap." (EUD Colombia)

d. Enhancing CSOs' capacities, sustainability, and their alliance-building efforts.

"Through the exchange of ideas and information among the vast array of CSOs, good practices are shared thus increasing capacities of some of the groups such as grassroots CBOs who previously had low capacities. Also, with the upcoming youth organisations, it has been noted that they are more innovative and think out of the box." (EUD Somalia)



Achieving impact through consultations and dialogue with CSOs depends on multiple factors, among which EUDs have highlighted **the relevance⁴⁴ of the engaged CSOs** as the paramount factor for impact (mentioned by 59 EUDs compared to 49 in 2022). **Effective engagement of EUDs in interaction with CSOs during dialogue and beyond was considered a key element by 53 EUDs in 2023** (as compared to 47 in 2022). **CSO capacity** and preparedness to engage in dialogue was indicated by 37 EUDs, same as in 2022; while **a favourable context and opportunities** within which CSOs operate has increased in importance (mentioned by 20 EUDs in 2022 and 25 in 2023).

8. Advancing quality of consultations



The quality of consultations between EUDs and civil society is undergoing a gradual transition, shifting from EUD-led consultations to more balanced, two-way dialogues. However, most consultations (53%) are still conducted on an ad-hoc basis, with 30 EUDs advancing toward a more regular and strategic approach to dialogue.

A significant number of EUDs continue to engage irregularly and lack a systematic approach in their consultations with CSOs. The majority of EUDs still predominantly adopted an ad-hoc approach⁴⁵ (53%) or a regular approach⁴⁶ (25%). **Notably, only 6% of consultations involved EUDs adopting a Structured Dialogue⁴⁷**, marking a slight improvement from 3% in 2021 and 5% in 2022.⁴⁸ In the remaining 17% of cases, EUDs either indicated that they had not held consultations, the information was not applicable, or the question was left unanswered.

Additionally, **consultations largely remained centralised**, with 64% of EUDs reporting that less than 25% of their events were decentralised both in 2023 and 2022. Despite ongoing efforts to organise decentralised and/or hybrid consultations continue, this trend implies that there is room to improve engagement with stakeholders in decentralised locations. While favouring a central location may be deliberate for reasons such as accessibility, infrastructure, and resource availability, a balanced approach is needed to ensure inclusivity.

Consultations with CSOs are taking place in nearly all countries⁴⁹ and across all relevant areas, including the NDICI-Global Europe (92 EUDs), GG (69 EUDs), TEI (81 EUDs), the Civil Society Roadmap (84 EUDs), the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy (89 EUDs), and the GAP III (90 EUDs). **Notably, 95 EUDs have reported organising dialogue between civil society and the HoD⁵⁰ on strategic issues and the relations with partner countries.**

44 Relevant CSOs are defined as CSOs with a stake on the core issues discussed during the consultations. Relevance can be defined by the thematic or sectoral engagement and experience of the CSOs; or by the fact that CSOs are affected positively or negatively, by the issues at the core of EU consultations; or by the influence a CSO or group of CSOs have on the issues.

45 See definition above, here repeated: An "ad-hoc" approach refers to consultations with CSOs that are called for when needed to obtain feedback and insights on specific policies, strategies, or programmes, often when decisions have already been made.

46 See definition above, here repeated: A "regular" approach entails at least two consultations per year, although not yet strategic or institutionalised as a permanent space for dialogue.

47 See definition above, here repeated: Structured dialogue is defined as a permanent or institutionalised space for dialogue with clear Terms of Reference, where a minimum number of consultation sessions take place, the contents and agenda can be discussed together in advance, and there is a regular flow of information among the parties involved.

48 The Structured Dialogue approach was employed in various areas, including dialogue with the Head of Delegation (10 EUDs), CS Roadmap (9 EUDs), Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy (6 EUDs), GAP III/Country Level Implementation Plan (5 EUDs), the MIP (5 EUDs), and TEIs (4 EUDs).

49 Consultations with CSOs occurred in 100 out of the 101 countries surveyed. The only exception was the EUD in Eritrea, which did not hold any consultations with CSOs.

50 The HoD's direct engagement with civil society focuses on issues related to the national social, economic, and political context, as well as the relationship between the EU and the partner country.



The quality of exchanges between EUDs and CSOs is largely determined by how consultation events are planned, prepared, and conducted, as well as whether feedback is sought from and provided to CSOs. The data confirms that **a core group of 30 EUDs have adopted a more co-created approach⁵¹ to dialogue**, applying it consistently in at least two areas of co-creation and facilitating productive exchanges with CSOs. However, the majority of EUDs only apply these practices occasionally.⁵² **In their consultations with CSOs, 11 EUDs consistently applied good practices in four areas of co-creation**, demonstrating a shift towards a two-way dialogue approach; while **19 EUDs applied good practices in at least three areas of co-creation**. Comparing the data from the three surveys (2021, 2022, and 2023), there is a positive trend, particularly in terms of sharing documents beforehand and setting the agenda jointly with CSOs.

51 This analysis considers four aspects of a co-creation approach: 1) informing CSOs in a timely manner; 2) sharing relevant documents in advance to allow CSOs to prepare effectively; 3) collaboratively defining the objectives and contents of the agenda; and 4) providing feedback to CSOs after the dialogue event.

52 In 2023, EUDs' practices remained consistent with those of 2022, with slight improvements. 6 EUDs shared relevant documents before every consultation event (compared to 3 in 2022), 43 EUDs did so in most cases (compared to 32 in 2022), 39 EUDs occasionally (compared to 45 in 2022), and 7 EUDs never (compared to 20 in 2022). In the planning of consultations, there was no notable advancement compared to the previous year. Similarly, the preparation and holding of consultations saw minimal but interesting progress, with 6 EUDs jointly defining the agenda before every meeting (up from only one in 2022), while the majority of EUDs practiced joint agenda-setting only occasionally (53 in 2023, compared to 61 in 2022). Regarding the provision of feedback by EUDs to CSOs regarding how CSO input has been taken on board, there was a slight increase in the sharing of meeting minutes (38 EUDs in 2023, up from 32 in 2022). However, some EUDs refrain from sharing written feedback or minutes of sensitive meetings to avoid putting CSOs at risk in challenging contexts.

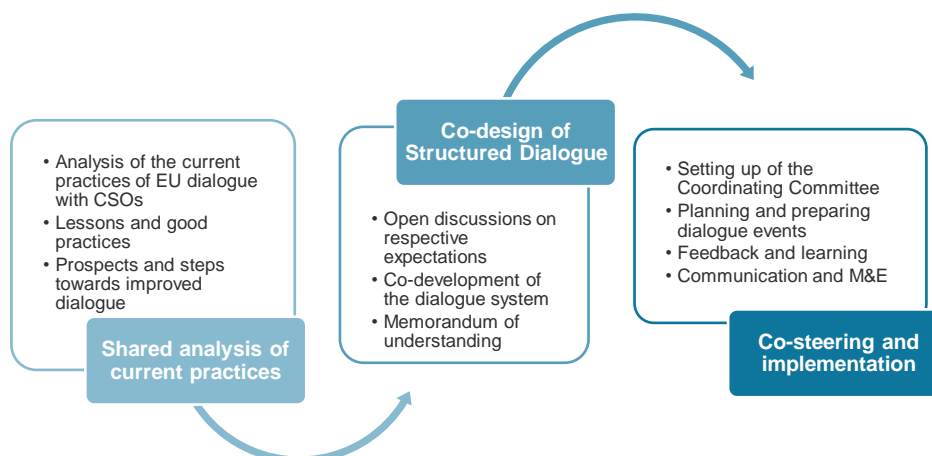


ESTABLISHING A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE SYSTEM BETWEEN THE EUD AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SENEGAL

In 2023, the EUD and CSOs in Senegal jointly led an initiative to establish a system for regular and strategic dialogue. This dialogue aimed to develop a system to discuss critical priorities related to development and democratic governance. The process was designed to engage both EU representatives and CSOs, through selected thematic networks, throughout various stages, ensuring shared ownership of the analysis, discussions, and decisions.

The initiative unfolded in several key stages:

1. **Shared analysis:** The first stage involved a collaborative assessment of current practices. This analysis identified lessons learned and good practices while also outlining expectations for future, improved engagement.
2. **High-level discussions:** EU representatives and CSO leaders engaged in high-level discussions, creating space for honest conversations about EU-CSO relations and, more broadly, EU-Senegal relations. This allowed both parties to express their respective expectations openly.
3. **Agreement on objectives and principles:** As a result of these discussions, the EU and CSOs agreed on a set of objectives and principles to form the foundation of the dialogue system.
4. **Memorandum of Understanding:** Both parties collaboratively developed a Memorandum of Understanding, which now serves as the guiding document for Structured Dialogue.
5. **Implementation:** The EUD and CSOs established a Coordinating Committee for the structured dialogue. They jointly planned the first event, collaboratively deciding on objectives, content, participants, logistical issues, and communication strategies. The implementation of the structured dialogue is ongoing, with a second decentralised event organised in 2024.



This experience exemplifies a successful model of collaborative engagement between an EUD and local civil society, highlighting shared decision-making, mutual respect, and cooperation. Together, they have opened inclusive spaces for dialogue to address critical development and governance challenges.

Objectives of the structured dialogue

"The structured dialogue is strategic in nature, aiming to become a permanent forum for exchange, contributing to the following objectives:

- To transform relations between the EU and civil society in Senegal towards recognition of CSOs as an essential counterpart in their role in promoting democratic values and just and sustainable development;
- To contribute to fair and equitable relations between the EU and Senegal, favouring the promotion of democratic governance and respect for human rights;
- To contribute to the definition and implementation of EU-Senegal cooperation policies that are effective, accountable, and beneficial to as many people as possible, particularly the most disadvantaged;
- In the medium term, to extend the EU-civil society dialogue to neighbouring countries and the ECOWAS region with the aim of encouraging the participation of civil society in building an EU-Africa partnership that meets the expectations of the people, particularly future generations".

Source: Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and CSOs to establish a Structured Dialogue, article 6.



9. Conclusions and recommendations

Consultations and dialogue with CSOs are becoming a cornerstone of EU policy development and implementation in partner countries, marked by a clear trend towards more regular and strategic engagements, expanding to new priorities and initiatives.

Although the Global Gateway Communication was only recently adopted in 2021 and the implementation still in its early stages, **a significant number of EUDs (69) consulted with CSOs regarding GG initiatives in 2023**. The climate and energy sector saw the most extensive CSO involvement, with 69 EUDs at least informing CSOs, and 35 EUDs consulting CSOs during the design and/or implementation stages. In contrast, consultations in other sectors—particularly digital, health, and transport—have remained comparatively limited, possibly reflecting the lower prevalence of GG projects in these areas as one of the contributing factors. This strong engagement in climate and energy projects reflects the EU's strategic emphasis on Green Deals and the transition to sustainable energy (56% of GG flagships were related to the climate and energy sector). However, the data reveals that **consultations around GG remain nascent**, with an ad-hoc approach often prevailing. There remains a **critical need to engage a broader and more relevant range of actors, particularly CSOs representing communities affected by GG projects**.

Consultations with CSOs are consistently occurring around NDICI-Global Europe at the country level, especially across MIP priority areas, including TEIs. In 2023, 92 EUDs consulted CSOs on NDICI-Global Europe, a substantial increase of 34 compared to 2021, signalling that this practice is becoming institutionalised. CSOs were engaged across all thematic priorities, including the AAP, which showed remarkable progress (from 35 EUDs in 2021 to 77 in 2023). Moreover, **CSO involvement in TEIs is rapidly gaining momentum, with 81 EUDs engaging CSOs**, a notable increase from 60 in 2022. This trend is particularly pronounced in the implementation and monitoring phases of TEIs.

These advances in mainstreaming CSO consultations across policy and thematic priorities, beyond traditional engagement areas, demonstrate **a learning curve in the EU's approach to civil society engagement**, which has accelerated in recent years. A comparative analysis of EUDs' engagement with CSOs from 2021 to 2023 highlights significant progress in fostering inclusive and impactful dialogues, especially in the following areas:

- **Context-driven and localised approaches:** The substantial increase in engagement with grassroots and community-based organisations, from 20% in 2021 to 50% in 2023, underscores the EU's commitment to understanding and addressing local contexts and needs. This approach is vital for ensuring that EU actions are shaped by those directly affected, though it has yet to be uniformly adopted across all programmatic areas.
- **Growing importance of political dialogue:** The data highlights the significance of political dialogue between CSOs and Heads of Delegation, with 95 EUDs organising such consultations in 2023, up from 92 in 2022. Nearly half (45%) of these engagements in 2023 were structured and regular, indicating a shift towards deeper political dialogue. This growing recognition by HoDs of CSOs' vital role in promoting democratic governance positions them as essential partners in shaping institutional relations with governments in partner countries, fostering inclusive and transparent governance processes.
- **Inclusive and diverse engagement:** The diversity of CSOs involved in consultations has expanded to include women's organisations, youth groups, thematic networks, grassroots organisations, private sector bodies, trade unions, rural civil society, and CSOs representing marginalised groups. Engagement with women's organisations saw a significant increase, with EUDs rating their involvement as highly relevant, rising from 43% in 2021 to nearly 75% in 2023. This



inclusive approach aligns with the EU's GAP III, Youth Action Plan, and Agenda 2030 commitment to leaving no one behind, as well as the Global Gateway's value-driven agenda, recognising the crucial role these groups play in fostering sustainable and resilient societies.

- **Quality of consultations:** The quality of consultations between EUDs and CSOs remained largely consistent from 2021 to 2023, with around half characterised by ad-hoc approaches, and a quarter showing regular engagement. A limited but notable shift towards more Structured Dialogue was observed, with 6% of consultations in 2023 being categorised as structured, up from 3% in 2021. 30 EUDs demonstrated a consistent commitment to regular, meaningful, and strategic consultations with CSOs, emphasising co-creation.

Most importantly, the increasing quality and frequency of consultations with CSOs is evidenced by their **growing impact on EU policies and programmes**. In 2023, 80 EUDs reported positive impacts resulting from these consultations — up from 73 in 2022 and 50 in 2021. These consultations led to better-informed policies, enhanced accountability, improved funding decisions, and overall, a more equitable relationship between the EU and CSOs.

9.1 The way forward

Analysis of data from surveys conducted in 2021, 2022, and 2023 reveals a clear upward trend in the quality, breadth, and depth of EUDs' consultations with CSOs. To build on this progress and further enhance civil society's engagement and impact in EU initiatives across partner countries, particularly around Global Gateway initiatives, it is crucial to leverage the advancements made between 2021 and 2023. The following recommendations offer a roadmap to deepen and refine these efforts.



ON ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT WITH CSOS IN GLOBAL GATEWAY

EUDs are strongly encouraged to adopt a more strategic approach to engaging with civil society within the framework of the Global Gateway strategy. This shift should consider the following:

- Establish regular and strategic dialogue:** Building on the initial engagement in 2023, **EUDs should swiftly establish more regular and strategic dialogue with a broad range of CSO actors involved in GG initiatives.**
- Engage with affected communities:** **Engagement with CSOs in GG must involve citizens groups and local communities directly affected by GG projects. This should include tailored approaches at decentralised level.**
- Consult women and youth CSOs:** **Women and youth-focused CSOs should be systematically consulted on GG initiatives, aligning the practices to those of other policy areas.**
- Investment in sectoral mapping:** **EUDs should undertake sectoral mapping and analysis of CSOs relevant to specific Global Gateway initiatives. This will help generate new insights and knowledge, enabling EUDs to identify relevant actors engage to engage in dialogue at both policy and project levels.**
- Context sensitive Dialogue:** **EUDs should facilitate tailored dialogue platforms with CSOs, customised to the specific context and sector of each GG initiative.** These dialogues should be carefully planned, to ensure that CSOs can make meaningful contributions thereby enhancing the accountability, impact, and sustainability of GG initiatives.



- f) **Multi-stakeholders dialogue at policy level:** At the policy level, dialogue should be multi-stakeholders, with all relevant actors represented and enabled to participate, contributing to policy and strategy development and monitoring.
- g) **CSOs participation at project level:** Relevant CSOs should be involved from the inception of GG initiatives, with specific resources allocated to foster meaningful partnerships. Their participation should be integrated into all key stages, from project identification through to implementation and closure. EUDs should also consider investing in the capacity development of CSOs, supporting their research, advocacy, and action to enable informed and independent participation. This is particularly important for CSOs representing communities and vulnerable groups directly impacted by the project.
- h) **Engagement in “hard” infrastructure projects:** For "hard" infrastructure projects, CSOs representing communities directly affected should be both informed and empowered to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. This includes involvement in investment decisions, Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), as well as in the development, implementation, and monitoring of related management plans.



ON IMPROVING PRACTICES OF CONSULTATIONS AND DIALOGUE WITH CSOS AROUND NDICI-GLOBAL EUROPE

- **Context-driven approaches:** Recognising that no single approach suits all situations, EUDs should enhance their efforts to customise CSO engagement based on local contexts and EU-partner country priorities. This tailored approach should consider factors such as civic space, CSO capacities, challenges, and available resources. It remains crucial to adopt context-specific and thematic-driven strategies.
- **Inclusiveness and local voices:** Building on the progress made over the past three years, EUDs should continue and enhance their efforts to include local grassroots organisations and diverse voices directly affected by EU programmes in their civil society consultations and dialogues. While many EUDs have been engaging with local grassroots CSOs, there is room to broaden this engagement further, particularly around GG initiatives. Recognising the value of this inclusive approach, EUDs should extend their consultations on the GG to reach out to CSOs representing communities and vulnerable groups impacted by GG initiatives. This widening of participation is important for addressing community needs, upholding human rights, environmental, and social standards, and ultimately ensuring their impact and sustainability.
- **Refining Structured Dialogue:** Promoting and refining the structured dialogue approach is crucial, ensuring its appropriate application in favourable environments while complementing it with ad-hoc and regular consultations as needed. This strategy allows EUDs to adapt to diverse and evolving relationships with civil society. It strikes a balance between managing an increasing demand of consultations across various policy areas and developing more consistent, meaningful, and strategic engagement with CSOs.
- **Supporting EUDs in implementation:** The data collected from 2021 to 2023 highlights several obstacles that hinder many EUDs from enhancing consultations with CSOs and progressing towards more consistent and strategic dialogue. These barriers are multifaceted, primarily relate to capacities of both EUDs and CSOs. For instance, an EUD may face limitations on staff skills (participation, facilitation, communication, and other relevant skills), while CSOs struggle with engaging in policy dialogue and technical expertise. Equally important, are the resource constraints, both



financial and human, which many EUDs continue to grapple with despite recent progress. Consequently, there is a pressing need to extend existing and, where necessary, introducing additional mechanisms that support EUDs in the practical implementation of dialogues. This encompasses providing tailored guidance, technical assistance, and resources to ensure effective planning, preparation, and follow-up of consultation events. Moreover, fostering effective engagement before, during and beyond these dialogues is paramount. Such engagement not only enhances the quality and impact of the consultations but also helps building a more collaborative and trusting relationship between EUDs and CSOs.

- **Promoting peer learning and interconnectedness:** Building on the efforts so far led by INTPA G2, more spaces should be promoted to allow EUDs to exchange best practices and insights gained from engagements, as well as the diverse challenges they encounter. Additional regional and thematic fora for peer learning and knowledge sharing can enable EUDs to adopt more strategic and impactful approaches to civil society dialogue. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation through the sharing of experiences, EUDs can collectively enhance their capacity to engage in meaningful and productive consultations with CSOs, ultimately strengthening the partnership between the EU and civil society in partner countries. This collective learning not only strengthens the partnership between the EU and CSOs in partner countries, but also reinforces the EU's commitment to transparency and accountability.
- **Enabling engagement with local CSOs:** The data collected from 2021 to 2023 highlights the importance of continued investment in refining approaches and strengthening the capacities of local CSOs, especially those representing marginalised and discriminated groups. By tailoring methods to grassroots CSOs, offering training, resources, and customised support, these organisations can be empowered to engage more effectively in dialogues and contribute meaningfully to policy-making processes. This targeted assistance will not only enhance the inclusivity and representativeness of consultations but also ensure that the unique perspectives and needs of these often-overlooked groups are taken into account. Ultimately, this approach leads to more equitable and impactful outcomes, fostering a stronger sense of ownership and participation within civil society.