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# Civil Society Consultations in Partner Countries

**2024 Report on EU Delegations'  
Engagement with Civil Society**



European Commission  
Directorate-General  
for International Partnerships  
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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AAP</b>	Annual Action Plan
<b>AP</b>	Action Plan
<b>CBO</b>	Community-based Organisation
<b>C&amp;D</b>	Consultations & dialogue
<b>CfP</b>	Call for Proposals
<b>CLIP</b>	Country Level Implementation Plan
<b>CS</b>	Civil Society
<b>CSFP</b>	Civil Society Focal Point
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DFI</b>	Development Finance Institution
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUD</b>	European Union Delegation
<b>FBO</b>	Faith-based Organisation
<b>FPIC</b>	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
<b>FSTP</b>	Financial Support to Third Parties
<b>GAP</b>	Gender Action Plan (GAP III)
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
<b>GG</b>	Global Gateway
<b>GRO</b>	Grassroots Organisation
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Delegation
<b>HRBA</b>	Human rights-based approach
<b>INTPA</b>	Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships
<b>LGBTIQ</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and other individuals
<b>MIP</b>	Multi-annual Indicative Programme
<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>NDICI</b>	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review
<b>SD</b>	Structured Dialogue
<b>STI</b>	Science, Technology, and Innovation
<b>TEI</b>	Team Europe Initiative
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>WRO</b>	Women's Rights Organisations
<b>YAP</b>	Youth Action Plan
<b>YSB</b>	Youth Sounding Board



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2024 Report

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: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations"<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, this commitment is embedded in the Global Gateway Communication<sup>2</sup>, 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 Jozef Síkela<sup>2</sup>: *"I consider civil society's participation key to Global Gateway's success, for at least two reasons. First, inclusiveness and ownership. Civil society involvement is essential to ensure that our interventions and investments resonate with local realities"*

**Civil society engagement is thus integral to the EU's Global Gateway principles**, ensuring that the Strategy—across both hard and soft infrastructure projects—remains anchored in the Union's values throughout the entire cycle, from policy and programming to project design, implementation, and monitoring. This strengthens transparency, accountability, and inclusive outcomes.

This report examines the consultations and dialogue (C&D) held by EU Delegations (EUDs) with civil society organisations (CSOs) in DG INTPA partner countries in 2024, analysing both quantitative and qualitative aspects, also drawing upon recommendations set forth by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)<sup>3</sup>, CONCORD<sup>4</sup>, and other international benchmarks. It represents the fourth iteration of this annual analysis and therefore it also presents trends derived over the course of four years analysed.<sup>5</sup>

## **Key findings and trends:**

### **a) Consultations with civil society were near-universal**

In 2024, 99 of 102 EUDs engaged CSOs in at least one programmatic or thematic area<sup>6</sup>, consolidating a culture of dialogue that has steadily expanded since 2021. Local organisations remained the backbone of engagement (around 80%), while the composition of participants evolved:

- Community-based and grassroots actors accounted for 31% (down from 50% in 2023).
- Private-sector-linked organisations rose sharply to 20% (from 7%).
- Youth organisations increased to 18%, up from 13% in 2023.
- Women's rights groups held steady at 15%.
- Platforms and coalitions represented 11%, down from 12% in 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development](#)

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> OECD, DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, OECD/LEGAL/5021

<sup>4</sup> CONCORD, Building partnerships through meaningful consultation: 7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making, October 2022

<sup>5</sup> [https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/civil-society-consultations-partner-countries-2023-report-eu-delegations-engagement-civil-society\\_en](https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/civil-society-consultations-partner-countries-2023-report-eu-delegations-engagement-civil-society_en)

<sup>6</sup> For the remaining three EUDs, survey responses were not conclusive and therefore no clear interpretation can be drawn.



Thematically, EUDs consulted on a broad spectrum, from human rights and governance to climate, digitalisation, and investment-related issues, signalling a maturing ecosystem aligned with evolving EU priorities. EUDs perceived CSO contributions as strongest among human rights and governance actors ( $\approx 70\%$  rated strong). Social development organisations consolidated as high performers ( $\approx 90\%$  rated medium or strong). Climate-focused and youth actors gained ground but still trail more established interlocutors. Trade unions, rural and informal-economy organisations, and directly affected communities remain marginal, underscoring persistent representation gaps. Youth CSOs continued to demonstrate value, while women's rights organisations sustained substantive influence across governance and social policy debates—continuities that echo last year's trajectory of institutionalisation and widening diversity. Faith-based organisations (FBOs) participated in C&D events in 2024 (first year surveyed; over one third of EUDs report FBO participation), spanning (large) international and national FBOs and across all main religious beliefs.

### **b) Global Gateway engagement expanded but remains incipient**

In 2024, 82 EUDs reported having involved CSOs in consultation and/or dialogue around the Global Gateway agenda in their countries, representing a 18.8% increase with respect to 2023. Yet, most activity remained at the information-sharing stage, with fewer consultations at sector or project design level and very limited involvement during implementation and monitoring. Energy, climate, and education and research stood out as sectors where civil society input was more systematically sought.

Among the 32 EUDs that carried out GG-specific consultations, policy/governance, women's rights, and youth CSOs figured most prominently, while workers' organisations, informal-economy groups, and communities directly affected by projects were less involved. Plans to strengthen the evidence base through CSO mappings are promising, but progress is still limited; without such efforts, engagement risks privileging the most visible actors.

Consultations on Global Gateway are therefore still less systematic than in other areas, but hold significant promise as the EU's flagship external agenda continues to unfold. Deeper involvement of civil society in shaping climate, transport, energy, education, and digital projects can enhance the EU's value-driven approach by combining technical and financial expertise with locally anchored perspectives. Importantly, GG requires expanding consultation practices beyond traditional EU–CSO formats and embedding them in multi-stakeholder approaches: Because GG also brings in new actors (i.e. private sector representatives, development finance institutions (DFIs), technical ministries, and implementing agencies) multi-stakeholder approaches are needed to bridge perspectives and interests.

Civil society's participation in these spaces adds particular value: it strengthens accountability, embeds social and environmental safeguards, and ensures that large-scale investments respond to local needs. Multi-stakeholder platforms are thus not complementary but essential mechanisms to ground the transformative ambitions of Global Gateway in inclusive and participatory processes.

Emerging examples from Indonesia, the Dominican Republic, and Nepal, where EUDs piloted or supported platforms linked to just energy transition, digitalisation, and education, demonstrate the potential of structured dialogue to align priorities and foster shared ownership. These initiatives provide practical models for peer learning and replication across regions.

### **c) Engagement on NDICI–Global Europe remains well-institutionalised**

Consultations clustered around AAPs and long-standing priorities (governance, human rights/democracy, gender equality). Newer or more specialised areas (green alliances, digitalisation, migration) were less frequently addressed or deemed context-specific. Qualitative evidence points to a gradual deepening of practice: EUDs increasingly time dialogue with strategic moments, link it to recognised policy frameworks, and adapt formats to restrictive environments. The overall pattern



confirms continuity with past years: a broadening of the CSOs consulted and a slow but steady shift from episodic to more purposeful exchanges.

#### **d) Approaches continue to evolve incrementally**

Ad-hoc consultations still predominate ( $\approx 50\%$ ), while regular formats remain stable ( $\approx 25\%$ ). Structured Dialogue grew modestly from a low base. Political and high-level policy dialogue continued to be a visible strength, often led by Heads of Delegation, reinforcing institutional commitment and creating influential entry points into national debates. Multi-stakeholder approaches are emerging in some contexts, with early results pointing to their potential for advancing civil society engagement in Global Gateway.

#### **e) The quality of exchanges has improved, if unevenly**

A core group of 40 EUDs consistently practiced co-creation (i.e. joint agendas, pre-circulated materials, structured feedback). Most others applied these features intermittently. Communication channels remained regular and multi-modal (in-person, virtual, hybrid), and standing working groups retained their relevance.

CSO satisfaction data suggest that, while technical arrangements are not always optimal, content and opportunities for dialogue are generally well-rated. Perceptions of EUD openness, hierarchy involvement, and follow-up show progress but still trail content-related satisfaction. The direction of travel is positive: more EUDs are moving from one-way consultation towards two-way, predictable dialogue with embedded feedback cycles, consistent with last year's shift from ad-hoc to more structured formats.

#### **f) Impact is now clearer and better evidenced**

17 EUDs reported significant changes attributable to dialogue with CSOs, and 53 noted incremental improvements. These ranged from legislative and policy shifts to more responsive programming, stronger political dialogue, and improved safeguards in sensitive sectors.

Case evidence shows CSO inputs shaping national reforms, enhancing programme design, informing high-level EU engagement with governments, and anchoring learning across the project cycle. The conditions for impact are increasingly well understood, building upon relevant and representative CSOs, structured and well-prepared consultation processes, and visible, proactive EUD leadership. Where these align, dialogue moves beyond inclusion to demonstrable outcomes, an evolution that reinforces last year's central message: rising quality and frequency of consultation correlate with tangible policy and programmatic gains.

Looking ahead, the EU should pursue and accelerate its efforts to ensure inclusive, accessible dialogue spaces that enable CSOs, especially those representing diverse, intersectional, and marginalised groups, to participate on equal terms and freely express their main concerns and expectations. As Global Gateway is implemented, engagement with CSOs must sit at the core of every initiative alongside the private sector and other stakeholders. Investments will be genuinely transformative, and tackle deep-rooted inequalities while contributing to global challenges, only if they are shaped first and foremost by the voices of those most affected.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

The EU recognises the diversity of civil society and its multifaceted role in governance and development. Its commitment to supporting and collaborating with civil society is reflected across EU policy, including the NDICI–Global Europe Regulation, and has been consistently reaffirmed since the 2012 Communication, “The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations”.

That commitment is central to the Global Gateway strategy: a value-driven initiative anchored in the European Union’s high social, environmental, fiscal, and labour standards and underpinned by a human rights-based approach. As the Global Gateway Communication<sup>7</sup> states, “*those most affected by potential projects must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement.*”

Civil society engagement is therefore a core requirement to ensure Global Gateway’s principles are consistently applied, ensuring that the Global Gateway, across both hard and soft infrastructure, remains true to its values throughout the entire cycle, from policy and programming to project design, implementation, and monitoring, while strengthening transparency, accountability, and inclusive outcomes.

This report examines how EU Delegations (EUDs) are cultivating substantive consultations and dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) across various policy areas and strategies, in line with Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) priority areas and the Global Gateway. The report draws on guidance from OECD-DAC<sup>8</sup>, CONCORD<sup>9</sup> and other international benchmarks.

Specifically, the 2024 edition analyses EU–CSO consultation practice in partner countries of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (hereafter referred to as “INTPA partner countries”) EU partner countries, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. It assesses practice against the principles and policy orientations of the Lisbon Treaty, the 2012 Communication, and other relevant international standards.

As the fourth iteration (following editions based on 2021–2023 data), it traces the evolution of consultation and dialogue, extracting trends, lessons, innovations, and impact. Key highlights and emerging findings are presented throughout this report.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 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>

<sup>8</sup> OECD, DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, OECD/LEGAL/5021

<sup>9</sup> CONCORD, Building partnerships through meaningful consultation: 7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making, October 2022

<sup>10</sup> The assessment draws on a survey (see appendix 3) conducted in June–July 2025, completed by 102 EU Delegations. While this approach enables broad coverage, it has limitations: it relies on a single, self-reported source; does not allow independent verification or deeper probing of specific issues; and does not include feedback from CSOs.



## 2. EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN CIVIL SOCIETY

In 2024, EU Delegations (EUDs) continued to consolidate their consultation practices with civil society, building on the steady progress reported since 2021. Out of the 102 EUDs surveyed, 99 engaged with CSOs across at least one programmatic or thematic area<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.1 Growing diversity of actors

Consistent with previous years, EUDs **placed a particular emphasis on engaging partner country CSOs**, which represented around **80% of all organisations consulted** (82% in 2023). Within this group, **community-based organisations (CBOs) and grassroots organisations (GROs) accounted for 31%**, down from 50% in 2023. This shift suggests that, while localisation remains a central principle, EUDs are increasingly engaging with a more diverse ecosystem of actors.

A **notable development in 2024 was the sharp increase in participation by organisations linked to the private sector**<sup>12</sup>, which rose to 20% (compared to 7% in 2023). This trend reflects EU's evolving approach to investment-driven partnerships under the Global Gateway (see appendix 2 on business fora). By contrast, trade unions remained underrepresented at 5%, despite their recognised role in advancing labour rights, decent work and just transitions.

Engagement with **youth organisations also increased, reaching 18% in 2024** (up from 13% in 2023), in line with EU's priorities under the Youth Action Plan in EU external action (YAP). **Women's rights organisations (WROs)** remained stable at 15% of the total, while **platforms, coalitions and networks** accounted for 11% (12% in 2023).

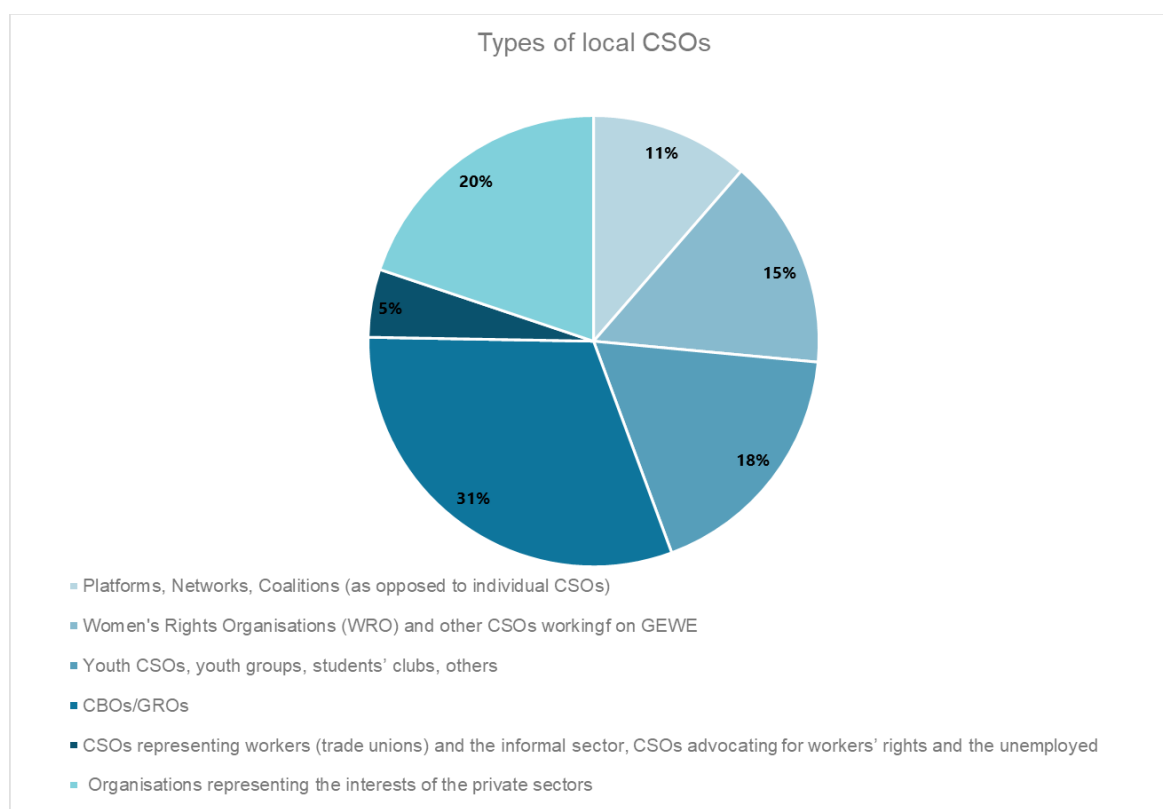


Figure 1: Types of local CSOs consulted by EUDs in 2024

<sup>11</sup> For the remaining three EUDs, survey responses were not conclusive and therefore no clear interpretation can be drawn.

<sup>12</sup> Organisations representing the interests of the private sector (business associations, chambers of commerce, private foundations, others).



**Thematic diversity of CSOs also remained very broad in 2024**, reflecting the breadth of the EU's policy agenda, from the well-established realms of engagement with CSOs such as human rights, governance, social development, gender equality, and youth empowerment, to the emerging topics aligned with the evolving EU agenda, such as climate change and green transitions, digitalisation, and private-sector engagement. This broad thematic reach demonstrates that EUDs are **drawing on diverse expertise to inform the roll-out of the Global Gateway** and the follow-up on the MIPs and Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs).

A comparison with 2023 reveals **both continuity and emerging trends in the perceived relevance of CSO contributions**. Human rights and governance organisations maintained their leadership role, with close to 70% assessed as strong contributors, underscoring their institutional maturity and policy influence. Women's rights organisations continued to be highly valued by EU Delegations, despite a slight decline from the exceptionally high recognition levels seen in 2023.

A notable development in 2024 was the **rise of social development organisations**<sup>13</sup> as a high-performing category (with nearly 90% rated as medium or strong contributors) suggesting the consolidation of a mature, policy-connected ecosystem. **Climate-focused organisations as well as youth organisations** also show upward momentum, with stronger contributions reported compared to earlier years, though both continue to lag behind more established interlocutors in terms of depth and strategic weight.

Organisations representing the interests of the **private sector** are increasingly participating in consultations, reflecting the EU's investment-driven cooperation agenda. Their contributions were assessed as substantial (medium to strong) by more than half of respondents, indicating growing engagement and recognition of their role. While collaboration with this category of actors can be further strengthened compared to others, the trend is positive. Continued efforts to clarify their roles and establish more structured engagement mechanisms, while also fostering meaningful exchanges with other CSO groups on issues related to the private sector's role in promoting sustainable development and upholding human rights, would help enhance the strategic quality and policy relevance of their contributions.

**Rural development CSOs**, including those working on land and sustainable livelihoods, farmers' associations and cooperatives, are central to climate adaptation, sustainable agricultural value chains and the defence of rural livelihoods and rights. Despite modest improvements since 2023<sup>14</sup>, they remain less visible in EU dialogue, while holding great promise for more meaningful engagement ahead. Furthermore, **trade unions and organisations representing the informal sector** continue to be marginal. With less than one third recognised as making medium or strong contributions, these actors risk being sidelined, despite their critical relevance for labour rights, just transitions, and inclusive growth.

Of the total of 102 EUDs surveyed, 36 EUDs confirmed **faith-based organisations** (FBOs) participation in C&D events in 2024, while the rest of EUDs either did not consult with FBOs or were uncertain. Few EUDs specified which FBOs participated, a mixture of (large) international and national FBOs, spanning across all main religious beliefs.

Overall, the 2024 data point to a maturing culture of engagement in core rights-based sectors, while also underscoring the need for more deliberate efforts to diversify participation, promote a more intersectional approach, and strengthen underrepresented voices, particularly those representing the

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<sup>13</sup> Organisations active on social development issues are those engaged in areas such as social justice, health, education, migration, food security, community resilience, and social protection. Their activities contribute to the achievement of SDGs related to social well-being, notably SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and are consistent with the NDICI–Global Europe cooperation areas on human development, migration and forced displacement, and social inclusion and protection.

<sup>14</sup> Of the total of consultations and dialogue C&D events organised in 2024 by EUDs, 63 EUDs reported that less than 25% of the C&D events were decentralised (outside capital/urban hubs). Thus, access is an issue for rural CSOs.

poor and marginalised, those who stand to benefit more from EU actions in partner countries, including groups directly affected by Global Gateway initiatives, whose participation is essential to driving social inclusion and ensuring equitable development outcomes.

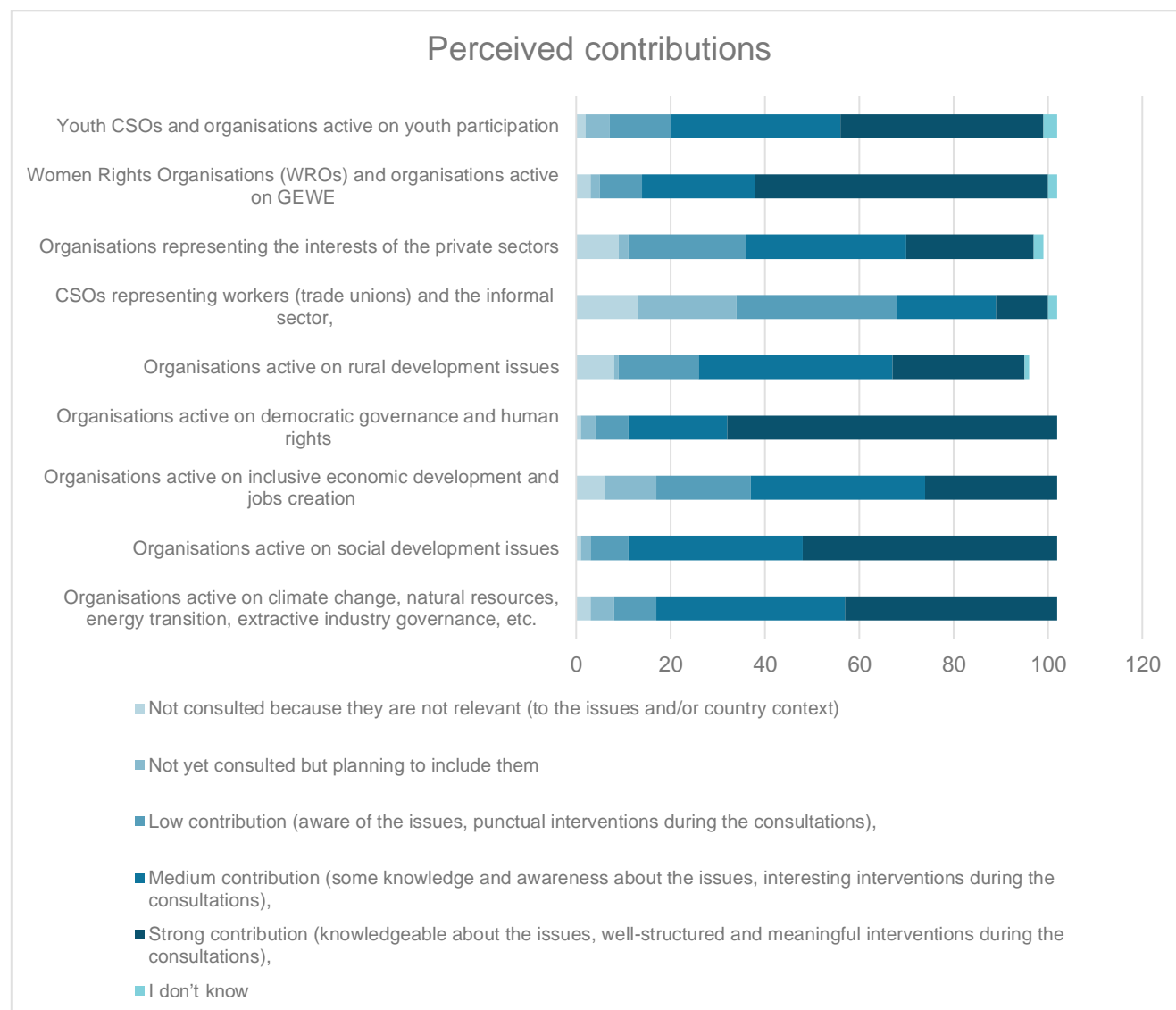


Figure 2: Perceived contributions by types of CSOs in 2024 (information from 102 surveyed EUDs)

## 2.2 Consolidation of women's and youth voices

Consultations with women's and youth organisations consolidated their role as a cornerstone of EUDs' engagement with civil society in 2024. **Women's rights and youth CSOs combined accounted for roughly one third of all local CSOs engaged** (15% and 18% respectively). This represents continuity in engagement with women's rights organisations and a notable increase in youth participation, confirming EU's commitments under the Gender Action Plan (GAP III) and the Youth Action Plan in EU external action (YAP).

The perceived quality of contributions of WROs to the dialogue remained high, with over 84% assessed as **medium or strong contributors**. **Youth CSOs made progress**, with **42% rated as strong contributors**, up from less than 40% in 2023.

In 2024, **36 EUDs reported having an operational Youth Sounding Board<sup>15</sup> (YSB)**; for more details, see Appendix 1), with an additional 27 planning to establish one within the next 12 months. This means that nearly 70% of EUDs which answered the survey either have or are preparing to have a YSB, reflecting growing momentum. YSBs contributed to consultations on **Global Gateway sectors**, including green transition, digitalisation, and education, and provided advisory notes, youth-led advocacy campaigns, and participation in Structured Dialogues.<sup>16</sup>



#### **Box 1 - Nigeria: Impactful youth engagement through YSB**

*The Nigerian YSB has delivered concrete results: issuing five advisory notes, expanding reintegration projects to include youth CSOs, and leading campaigns such as **#NeverOkay**, which generated one million impressions in two days. It also organised a virtual **Naija Talk Villa** town hall with over 100 CSOs, and Erasmus+ information sessions, demonstrating the value of*

Across the 36 EUDs where a YSB is operational at the moment of the survey, they were widely **recognised as constructive mechanisms for integrating youth perspectives into EU cooperation and external relations**. Where active, YSBs provided context-specific recommendations that enhance the relevance of EU programming, served as bridges to youth constituencies, and raised awareness of EU actions and policies. Their contributions spanned a wide range of thematic areas from migration, governance, and employment to environmental advocacy, political participation, rural development, and LGBTIQ rights. YSBs were also reported to have supported policy shaping through advisory notes, feedback on Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Action Documents, and participation in Structured Dialogues, while also amplifying youth priorities in public events, media, and governance spaces.

#### **Box 2 - Main YSB achievements reported by EUDs**

**Youth–EU Dialogue:** *Establishing structured platforms for sustained engagement, enabling youth to influence national policy debate and EU programmes (i.e. MIPs, CSRMs, youth-oriented Civil Society Focal Point (CSFPs), others), including GG initiatives.*

**Visibility and Representation:** *Stronger youth presence at EU and GG events, climate conferences, and Erasmus+ fairs; and supporting public diplomacy roles, including producing content centred around rights-based approaches, leading social media campaigns, and hosting community events.*

**Building Capacity and Networks:** *Investing in member skills through training (i.e. in policy advocacy, digital literacy, others); and acting as connectors among youth networks nationally, regionally, and across regions.*

<sup>15</sup> In general, **Youth Sounding Boards (YSB)**; sometimes also referred to as Youth Advisory Structures/ YAS) serve the **purpose of enhancing youth engagement and inclusion in EUDs' programmes and activities**. Precisely, they shall advise EUDs on youth inclusion and empowerment; inform on youth needs and perspectives; support the EUDs to identify and better engage youth organisations and youth networks; provide a consultative space for youth to influence on EU's actions, advise /support in the design of the EU's future strategies and interventions, foster an inclusive **mechanism for Structured Dialogue between the EU and Youth** and when possible, government, in areas of EU key interest such as climate change, gender and social inclusion, and governance. Moreover, YSB shall **monitor /provide feedback and recommendations on current and future EU engagements**, provide information from a youth perspective. And lastly, YSB may inform and **serve as a knowledge hub to exchange information** and share ideas, engage in advocacy and communication activities on key issues related to youth, emerging trends and innovation, concerns, and opportunities.

<sup>16</sup> "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.

Good practices also emerged in **women's participation**. Several EUDs systematically linked consultations on Annual Action Plans (AAPs) and thematic programmes to GAP III objectives. WROs continued to play a strong role in shaping governance and social policy debates, including reforms on gender-based violence (GBV), women's leadership, and access to health and education.

### 3. ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY IN GLOBAL GATEWAY

In 2024, 82 out of 102 EUDs engaged with civil society organisations on Global Gateway, demonstrating growing recognition of the importance of CSO involvement. In most cases, engagement took the form of information sharing, an essential first step towards more structured consultations and dialogue. Building on this foundation, 32 EUDs have already advanced further, conducting consultations at sector or project level, setting the stage for deeper and more systematic participation in the next phase.

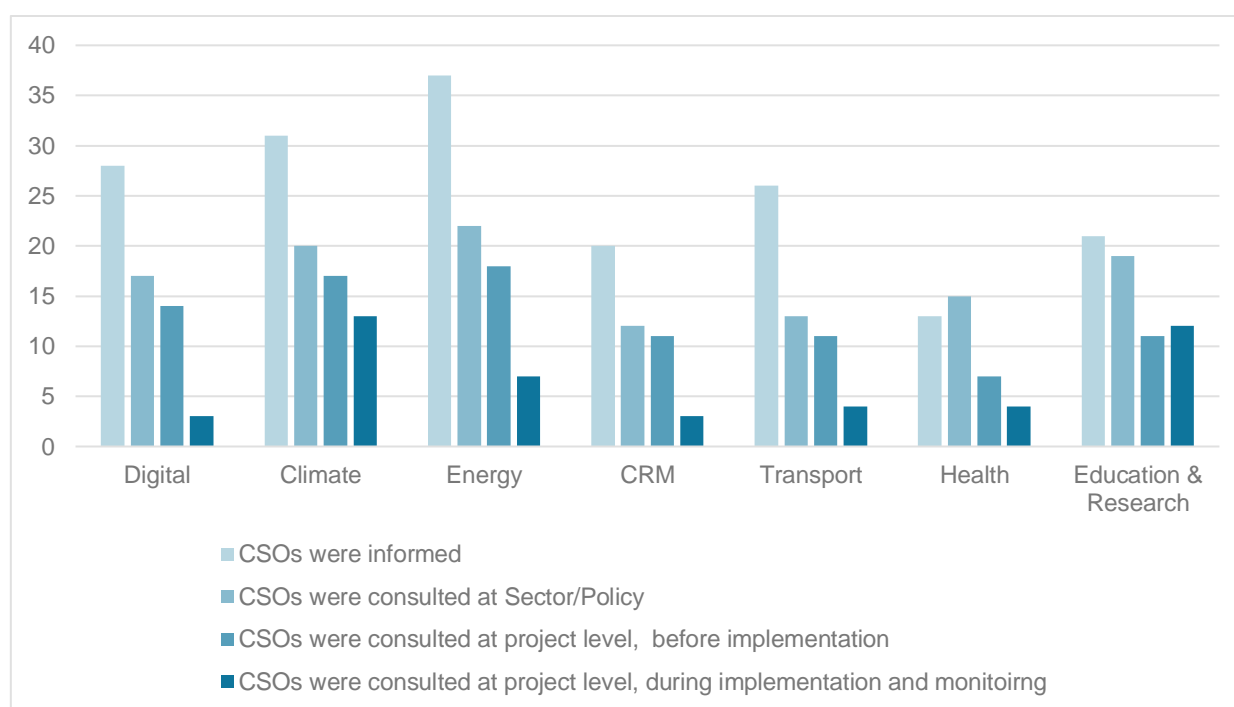


Figure 3: CSOs involvement in information, consultations, and dialogue across Global Gateway sectors in 2024

Across sectors, the most frequent form of engagement was **information sharing**, with the highest number of cases in **energy (37 EUDs)**, followed by **climate (31)**, **digital (28)**, and **transport (26)**. This points to a broad effort to ensure transparency, but in many contexts, engagement stopped short of deeper and more structured consultation.

At the **sector and policy level**, consultations took place primarily in the energy (22 EUDs), climate (20), and education and research (19) sectors, illustrating where EUDs most actively sought civil society input into policy discussions. At the **project design stage**, 49 consultation events were reported across three strategic sectors such as energy (18 EUDs), climate (17), and digital (14), reflecting growing efforts to integrate CSO perspectives from the outset of Global Gateway project development.

During **project implementation and monitoring** consultations remain incipient, possibly due to few Global Gateway projects being at implementation stage. **Only climate (13 EUDs) and education & research (12) show notable levels of CSO participation**, while in other sectors, EUDs rarely involved CSOs once projects were underway.

Overall, the findings reveal a clear pattern: **EUDs engage CSOs primarily at the information-sharing stage, with far fewer organising consultations at policy and project design stages, and even fewer during project implementation and monitoring.** Signs of deeper engagement are emerging, particularly in climate, energy, digital and education; but systematic involvement of CSOs across the full project cycle remains limited. Strengthening consultations and dialogue is therefore critical to ensure that CSO perspectives meaningfully shape Global Gateway strategies, policies, and projects.

### 3.1 Types of CSOs engaged in consultations on Global Gateway

The results from 32 EUDs that held consultations on Global Gateway in 2024 show that a diverse range of CSOs is being engaged, mostly those with which EUDs already have established links, but their contributions differ noticeably by type of organisation.

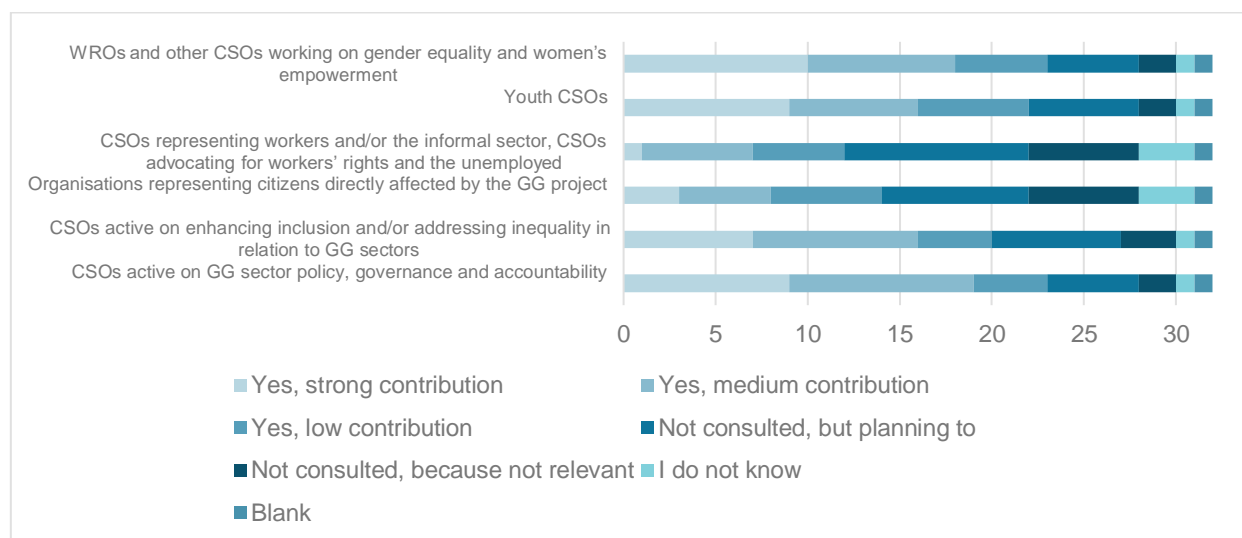


Figure 4: Participation in Global Gateway consultations, 2024: Types and contributions

**Policy, governance, and accountability CSOs** are among the most engaged, with 9 EUDs reporting strong contributions and 10 reporting medium contributions. **Women's rights CSOs** and **youth CSOs** also stand out, with 9 and 10 EUDs respectively noting strong involvement and a further 7 and 8 reporting medium contributions. Their visibility highlights how gender equality and youth actors are key in shaping inclusive and rights-based approaches to Global Gateway.

By contrast, **organisations representing citizens directly affected by projects** and **workers' organisations or CSOs from the informal sector remain marginal.** Only 3 EUDs reported strong contributions from affected citizens and just 1 from workers' organisations, while most EUDs indicated that these groups had not yet been consulted but might be included in future. This gap is striking, as these actors are often closest to the realities, risks, and trade-offs of large-scale projects.

CSOs working on **inclusion and inequality** present a mixed picture. While 7 EUDs noted strong contributions and 9 EUDs noted medium, another 7 reported no consultations at all. This suggests that important potential is being tapped into in some contexts, but contexts but remains underutilised in many others.

Combined, the findings show that of 32 EUDs that held consultations, **engagement is strongest with policy-oriented, youth, and gender-focused CSOs, while those most directly impacted by Global Gateway, local communities and workers, remain underrepresented.** Addressing this imbalance will be essential to ensure consultations are both inclusive and impactful across sectors.

Looking ahead, many EUDs recognise this challenge. **51 EUDs plan to undertake mapping studies or analyses of CSOs** to build a stronger knowledge base of actors relevant to their Global Gateway sectors and initiatives. This is a strategic step to identify and engage groups that are currently underrepresented, particularly citizens directly affected by projects and community-based or workers' organisations. Yet so far, systematic mapping remains limited: **only 7 EUDs have completed a**



**comprehensive study**; 10 EUDs have completed partial mappings, **while 23 have no such plans**, and 11 were unsure.

Without structured mapping and analysis, engagement risks remaining *ad hoc*, favouring already visible CSOs while overlooking those closest to project impacts or with valuable sector expertise. **Strengthening systematic mapping is therefore essential to broaden participation, ensure diversity, and make consultations more inclusive, responsive, and impactful.**

*'Technical assistance contracted with CSO's support measures conducted a civil society sectoral mapping. The mapping [...] was carried out based on criteria and guidelines aligned with the strategic priority themes of the Global Gateway agenda in Brazil [...] in areas such as renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, critical raw materials, green hydrogen, just green transition, and digital connectivity. The mapping identifies CSOs [...] with actions directly related to these topics [...] with particular attention to organizations working with minority groups that are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate and socio-environmental change, such as traditional populations, women, and youth. The database consists of 230 organizations. This diversity includes CSOs that develop technical solutions, act politically and in the defence of human rights defenders, with significant action in the country's strategic regions.'* (EUD Brazil)

## 4. ENGAGEMENT ON ACTIONS FUNDED BY NDICI–GLOBAL EUROPE

Consultations with CSOs around NDICI–Global Europe actions remained **a well-institutionalised practice in 2024**. Survey results show that 59 EUDs reported consultations on AAPs, while 54 consulted CSOs on governance and human rights/democracy, and another 54 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). Human development was also a frequent area of dialogue (40 EUDs). By contrast, consultations on sustainable growth (32 EUDs), green alliances (26), digitalisation (22), and migration (18) were less common. Migration and digitalisation/ Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) recorded the highest “not applicable” responses, suggesting that these remain niche or context-specific areas of engagement. Overall, the trend confirms that MIPs and AAPs continue to anchor consultation practices, ensuring that civil society perspectives are considered from the outset of programming.



### Box 3 – Pakistan: Broad stakeholder inclusion in AAP 2024

*During the AAP process, the EUD in Pakistan consulted a wide range of actors, including climate think tanks, chambers of commerce, trade unions, and private sector associations. Importantly, politically driven groups were filtered out to preserve neutrality. CSO feedback directly shaped migration reintegration programming and improved thematic targeting in business support policies.*

Qualitative evidence from EUDs illustrates the **gradual maturing of consultation practices**. The 2024 survey responses reveal a diverse set of approaches that go beyond routine consultation, showing how EUDs are finding more creative, inclusive, and results-oriented ways to engage civil society. While practices vary according to context, several common patterns stand out as particularly effective. These include embedding consultations at strategic moments of the programme cycle, integrating capacity-building into dialogue processes, and adapting safe-space formats in restrictive environments. Other EUDs reported linking consultations to international frameworks such as the Universal Periodic Review



(UPR),<sup>17</sup> embedding civil-society monitoring within Roadmap processes, or piloting structured engagement with governments and private-sector actors.

*‘After having focused between 2018 and 2022 its support on Gender equality, stability and social cohesion, the Delegation chose to concentrate its support to civil society acting in the field of Human rights protection, fight against discrimination and media / fight against disinformation (in a particular political context: presidential election will take place in October 2025). In December 2024 for instance, two contracts were signed with the objective to accompany civil society and the government in the implementation of the recommendations accepted by Cameroon during the 2023 **Universal Periodic Review**. This year, a big consultation took place in spring with civil society working with people living with disabilities and street children. Civil society brings a real added-value in forest governance (APV-FLEGT) and value chain (cocoa).’ (EUD Cameroon)*

#### **Box 4 – Lessons learnt from consultations on NDICI-Global Europe actions**

##### **1. Early, inclusive, and structured consultation**

Embed consultations ahead of decision points (AAPs, Calls for Proposals (CfPs), partnership dialogues) so civil society input shapes priorities from the outset.

Ensure regular and predictable dialogue (e.g. annual seminars, multi-stakeholder reviews) to sustain engagement.

Extend participation beyond capitals through regional missions or decentralised meetings to capture grassroots perspectives.

Anchor discussions in policy frameworks (e.g. UPR recommendations, national reforms) to ensure relevance.

##### **2. Safe and adaptive practices in restrictive or politically sensitive contexts**

Reframe formats (i.e. technical/thematic groups) to bypass barriers while retaining substance.

Adjust participation (e.g. trusted partners, separate groups) to reduce risks for vulnerable actors (e.g., human rights defenders, journalists).

Use informal, confidential channels (small groups, one-to-ones, discreet side meetings) to enable candid exchange.

##### **3. Multi-stakeholder and cross-sector approaches**

Foster triangular dialogue among civil society, government, private sector, and other sectors to build ownership and influence.

Integrate private sector actors (business associations, cooperatives, chambers) to broaden coalitions and diversify perspectives.

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<sup>17</sup> **EUD Uruguay:** “The improvement in the organizations’ capacities is a result of the support provided by the EU, which enabled them, for example, to submit an alternative report to the Universal Periodic Review.”



## 5. BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE: TOWARDS MORE SYSTEMATIC AND STRATEGIC PRACTICES OF CONSULTATION AND DIALOGUE

In terms of consultation practices, **the overall patterns observed in 2023 largely continued in 2024**. A significant number of EU Delegations still **relied predominantly on ad-hoc consultations**<sup>18</sup> (50% in 2024 compared to 53% in 2023 and 49% in 2022), while regular consultations<sup>19</sup> remained stable at around one quarter (similar to 2023 and 2022).

Among the reasons for still predominant use of ad-hoc consultations may be that in 2024, EUDs elaborated that **the lead time to consultations with CSOs in many instances varies depending on the type of consultations** (i.e. Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement; regional conference on the civil society regulatory environment; country-level dialogue; informal coordination) and the respective urgency of the meeting. **A shorter notice to consultations and ad-hoc meetings are used deliberately by some EUDs 'to avoid unnecessary "formalisation"' (EUD Cuba)**. And a less formalised exchange between EUD and CSOs is intentionally used **as an adaptive measure to restrictions in fragile political contexts**. An example of this situation would for instance be the EUD to Sudan, where *'consultations as official gatherings with at least 3 CSOs are not feasible. Given the Declaration of Crisis Situation, the Delegation can apply flexible procedures for contracting. In the case of Sudan, "consultation" must be interpreted as various types of interaction on ad hoc basis with one or more CSOs. CSOs are consulted on ad hoc basis to either identify interventions or on CSOs demand to share update on their activities and on political and security situation in Sudan.'* **(EUD Sudan)**.

Furthermore, the use of Structured Dialogue showed a modest but positive increase (7% in 2024, up from 6% in 2023 and 5% in 2022), signalling a gradual move towards more formalised engagement.

### Box 5 – EUDs practising Multi-stakeholder Dialogues report coordinated and respectful exchange with CSOs

*'In Structured Dialogue-guided meetings, annual and biannual agendas are discussed and shared with CSOs that are members of the Civil Society Dialogue Committee. One month before the event, regular exchanges (e-mails, weekly meetings, etc.) enable the themes and content of the dialogue to be clarified. Fifteen days before the event, CSOs formally inform their members and members of the government. At the level of EU Member States (MS), the EUD regularly monitors participation and contributions.'* (EUD Senegal)

*'For e.g. Structured Dialogue, we request CSOs to propose e.g. three topics. We have discussion on the three and then select one topic that is relevant at the time and is not antagonistic to other stakeholders (e.g. state authorities). We then ask CSOs to prepare a two-page concept note on the topic, propose a keynote speaker, and two discussants. Then we proceed to agree (with CSOs) on the date, participants and prepare the 'save the date' and invitation to stakeholders.'* (EUD Uganda)

Such exemplary exchange generates mutual benefits on the sides of the EUD, CSOs and even other stakeholders (EU MS, national government).

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> A "regular" approach entails at least two consultations per year, although not yet strategic or institutionalised as a permanent space for dialogue.



### Box 6 – Brazil: Co-creation of human rights dialogue

The EUD in Brazil partnered with Brazilian umbrella organisation ABONG and the European CSO network ENAR to co-design the EU–Brazil Human Rights Dialogue. CSOs contributed from topic selection to event design, ensuring relevance, ownership, and strong participation. Capacity building was also embedded, with proposal writing and financial management training linked to CfPs.

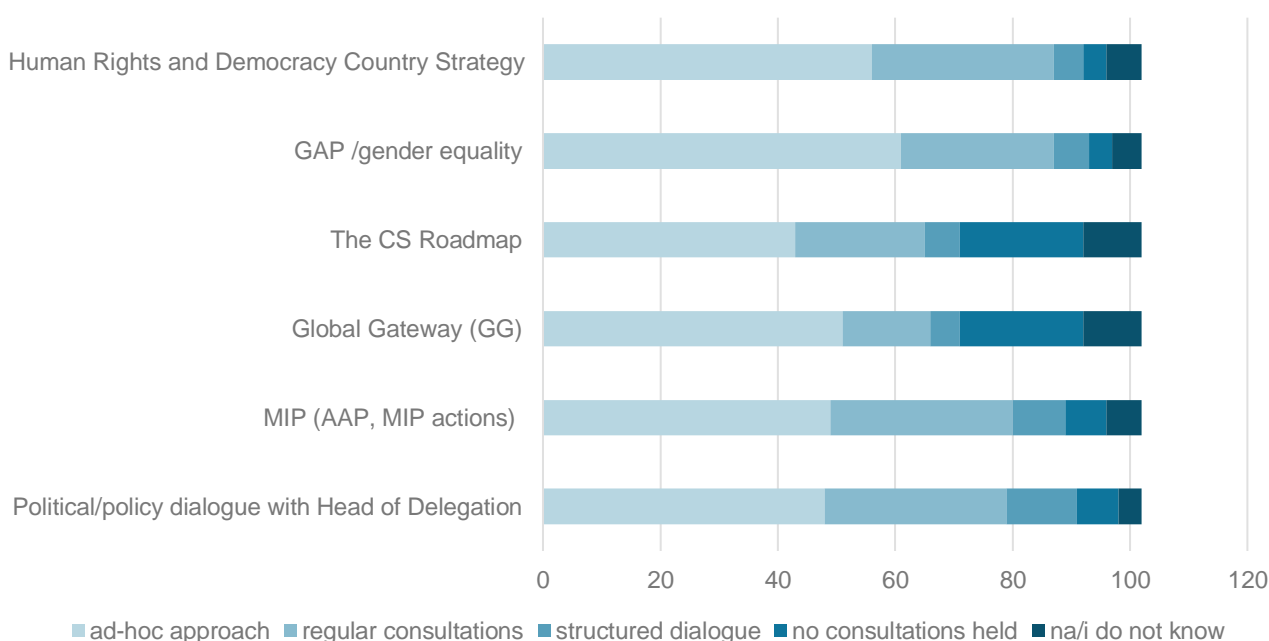


Figure 5: Approaches to consultations (in absolute numbers - 102 EUDs)

**Political and high-policy dialogue** remained one of the most visible and high-potential channels for engagement. Nearly 4 out of 5 EUDs maintained such dialogue with civil society, often with the direct participation of the Head of Delegation (HoD). This visible engagement sent a strong signal of political commitment and provided an important platform for informing policy at the highest level.

Qualitative findings show that EUDs sustained a broad and diverse consultation agenda in this realm, with human rights, democracy, and civic space emerging as the most consistently addressed themes in political and high-level dialogues with CSOs. This reflects the EU's enduring commitment to rights-based dialogue, frequently linked to CSO law reforms, the upholding of human rights, the fulfilment of international commitments, trade agreements, minority rights, and broader public diplomacy efforts. In this context, civil society engagement was not only instrumental for advancing an enabling environment and countering shrinking space but also served as a bridge between political dialogue and citizens' concerns, reinforcing the EU's legitimacy as a partner in governance and reform processes.



At the same time, as elaborated above, the **Global Gateway represents an area where consultations remained less systematic** yet hold significant promise as the new EU agenda continues to unfold. Deeper engagement with civil society in shaping infrastructure, energy, or digital projects has the potential to enhance the EU's distinct value-based approach by combining technical and financial expertise with locally anchored perspectives. What is more, the Global Gateway also **highlights the need to expand consultation practices beyond traditional EU-CSO formats and to anchor them in multi-stakeholder approaches**. The Global Gateway brings in new actors, such as private sector representatives, Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), technical ministries, and other implementing agencies, whose involvement calls for multi-stakeholder approaches that bridge diverse perspectives and interests. Multi-stakeholder platforms are therefore not just complementary, but essential to ensure that GG transformative ambitions are grounded in inclusive and participatory processes. Civil society participation in these spaces is crucial to strengthen accountability, embed social and environmental safeguards, and align large-scale investments to local needs and contexts.

Emerging examples from **Indonesia, the Dominican Republic, and Nepal**, where EUDs piloted or supported multi-stakeholder platforms linked to just energy transition, digitalisation, and education, demonstrate the potential of Structured Dialogue to reconcile competing priorities and foster shared ownership. These initiatives provide practical models for peer learning and replication across regions.

Finally, many EUDs continued to consult with CSOs as part of the process of defining priorities for Call for Proposals, during programming cycles (MIPs and AAPs), and in preparation and during major EU events. These touchpoints are important entry points for dialogue but risk confining civil society participation to specific moments. Moving towards a systematic and strategic approach would mean embedding such milestones within a broader, continuous process of engagement.



## 6. 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. 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 progress has been made in the quality of exchange: **a core group of 40 EUDs have adopted a more co-creative approach<sup>20</sup> to dialogue**, applying it consistently in at least two areas of co-creation and facilitating productive exchanges with CSOs (compared to 30 EUDs in 2023). However, the majority of EUDs only apply these practices occasionally. In 2024, some practices of EUDs' have recognisably improved, precisely setting the meeting agenda and ensuring feedback to and from CSOs after consultations.<sup>21</sup> Others have remained consistent with those of 2023 and 2022. Comparing the data from the four surveys (2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024), there is a positive trend, particularly in sharing documents beforehand, setting the agenda jointly with CSOs and in ensuring feedback to and from CSOs after the consultations.

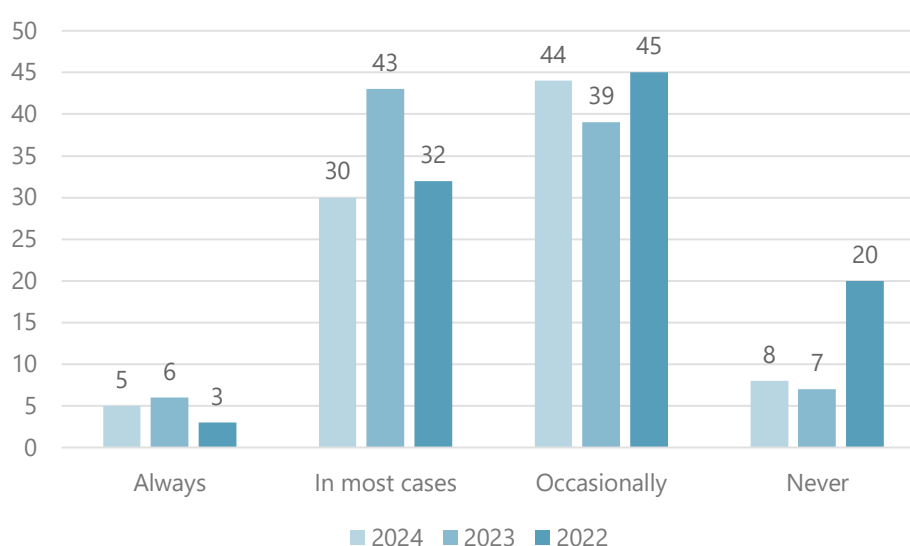


Figure 6: sharing relevant documents beforehand with CSOs – trends 2024 -2022

The data indicates a positive trend of increased understanding for the multiple benefits of **joint agenda-setting** alongside increased efforts among EUDs. All EUDs practicing a cooperative approach of

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> In 2024, some practices of EUDs' have recognisably improved, others have remained consistent with those of 2023 and 2022. 5 EUDs shared relevant documents before every consultation event (compared to 6 in 2023 and 3 in 2022), 30 EUDs did so in most cases (compared to 43 in 2023 and 32 in 2022), 44 EUDs occasionally (compared to 39 in 2023 and 45 in 2022), and 8 EUDs never (compared to 7 in 2023 and 20 in 2022). Some EUDs elaborated that restrictive environments may lead EUDs to share documents only during the meetings so not to endanger CSOs. Again in 2024, in the **planning of consultations**, there was no notable advancement compared to the previous years. However, EUDs elaborated that the lead time to consultations with CSOs in many EUDs varies depending on the type of consultations and the urgency of the meeting. The preparation and holding of consultations saw interesting progress, with 9 EUDs jointly defining the agenda before every meeting (up from 6 in 2023 and 1 in 2022), 32 EUDs practised joint agenda-setting in most cases (new additional category, no previous figures), 40 EUDs do so only occasionally (53 in 2023, compared to 61 in 2022). This indicates a clear trend over the past years of increased understanding for the multiple benefits of joint agenda-setting alongside increased efforts among EUDs. Regarding the **provision of feedback by EUDs to CSOs** regarding how CSO input has been taken on board, there was a good increase in the sharing of meeting minutes (48 EUDs in 2024, up from 38 in 2023 and 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.



agenda setting with CSOs do so aiming to enhance effective and meaningful participation of CSOs. Various practices<sup>22</sup> have been established by EUDs, indicating the Delegations' commitment as well as some critical reflection on need for change.

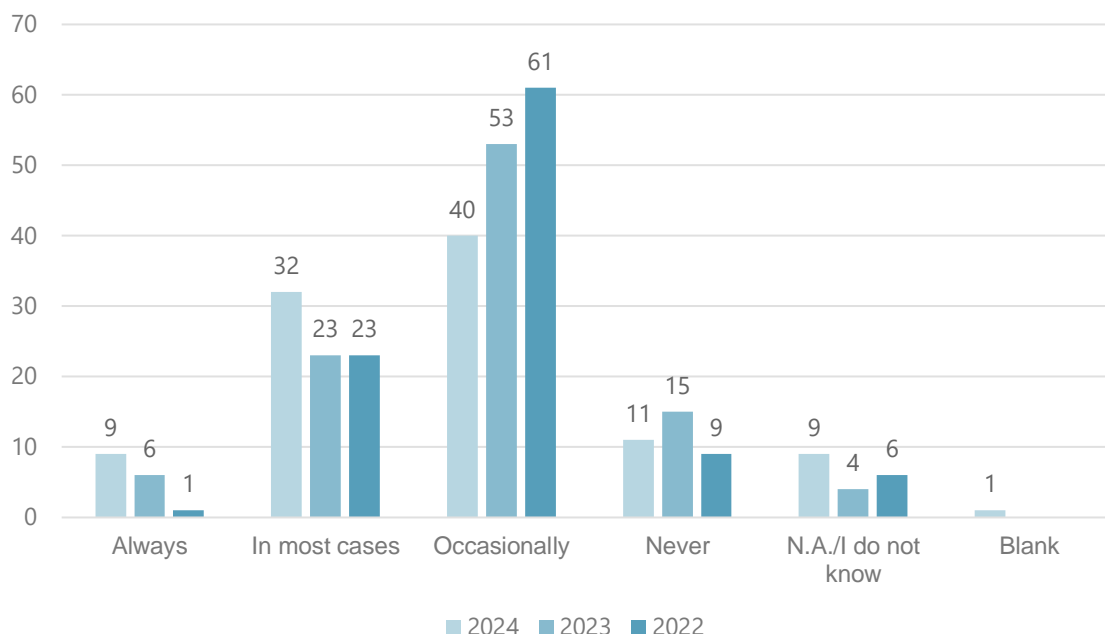
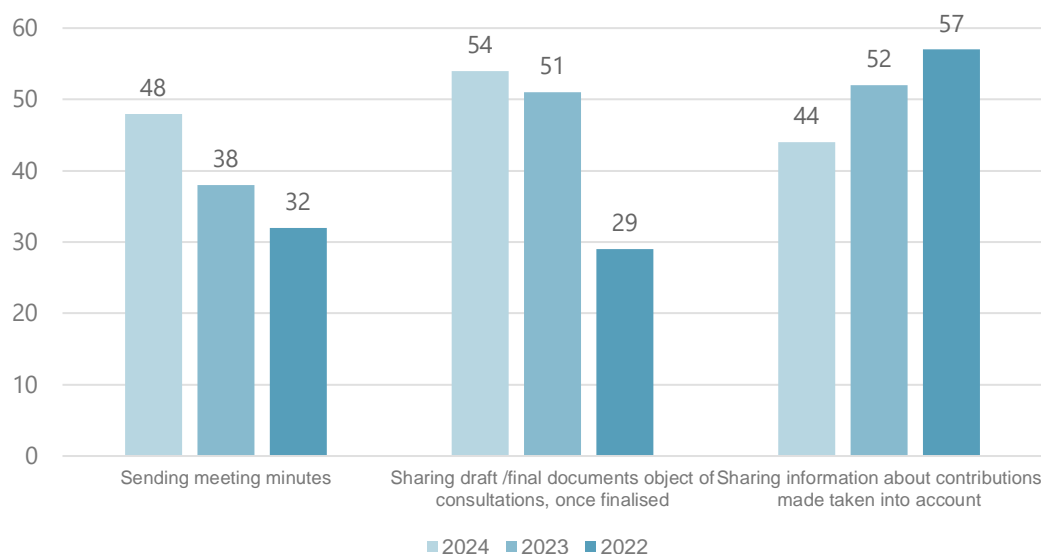


Figure 7: Setting meeting agendas jointly with CSOs – trends 2022-2024

Also, the **sharing of feedback to and from CSOs after consultations** is recognised as important: Many EUDs show valuable commitment engaging with CSOs, reflected in their feedback to and from CSOs after consultations. When feedback cannot be shared in writing, considering the political (i.e. restrictive) environment of the country, EUDs share feedback verbally.



<sup>22</sup> Among them 1. flagging agenda items for the next meeting upon agreeing on the meeting date; 2. sharing agenda proposed by EUD with flexibility towards suggestions from CSOs taken into consideration; 3. holding preliminary discussions prior to the meeting to agree on the agenda; 4. jointly deciding on meeting date and topics of discussion via CSO national platform, selecting agenda and participants jointly.

Figure 8: Ensuring feedback to and from CSOs after consultations – trends 2022-2024

The prevalent methods for consultation with CSOs are face-to-face (98 EUDs), virtual (75 EUDs) and hybrid (76 EUDs) meetings, indicating that that **personal exchange is the preferred and widely applied method of exchange**, while challenges to meet in person (i.e. resources, CSOs' remote location, safety issues, etc.) are considered by EUDs offering virtual and hybrid meeting alternatives. Also, standing working groups continue to play an important role (59 EUDs in 2024).

**The overwhelming majority of 94 EUDs maintain regular communication with CSOs**, same as in 2023. Only 8 EUDs keep in communication with CSOs only 'occasionally'. The data indicates the genuine interest and personal engagement of EUDs with CSOs in INTPA partner countries; recognising CSOs as valuable partners and in cooperation and communication.

**The level of satisfaction of CSOs with their participation in consultations and dialogue with EUDs** is measured in 3 categories: the consultations' **technical arrangements; content of the meetings and opportunities to engage in dialogue; and contribution of the EUD**.<sup>23</sup> While satisfaction with the consultations' technical arrangements in 2024 was moderate, with only 22 EUDs indicating the highest level, CSOs' satisfaction with the content of the meetings and opportunities to engage in dialogue was higher (35 EUDs indicating the highest level). This indicates that even if technical arrangements are not always satisfactory to CSOs, a majority of CSOs find the opportunities to engage with EUDs in consultations and dialogue sufficient. Satisfaction of CSOs with the contribution of EUDs (e.g. openness to CSOs' concerns; involvement of EUD hierarchy, follow-up actions, etc.) is slightly lower than the CSOs' satisfaction with the content of meetings and opportunities to engage in dialogue. The turnout leaves room for improvement regarding EUDs' openness to CSOs' concerns, the involvement of EUD hierarchy, follow-up actions after consultations and dialogue events.

**Of those EUDs assessing the satisfaction of CSOs with consultation and dialogue events, informal interactions with CSOs after consultation and dialogue events is the clearly preferred tool of assessment.** 60 EUDs choose informal interactions (compared to 69 in 2023). A mere 8 EUDs use surveys for assessing CSOs' satisfaction (compared to 3 in 2023). While 19 EUDs (compared to 17 in 2023) still do not assess CSOs' satisfaction with consultation and dialogue events.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The level of satisfaction of CSOs is based on the feedback EUDs receive from CSOs.

<sup>24</sup> 6 EUDs marked 'Other'; 9 left the question blank.

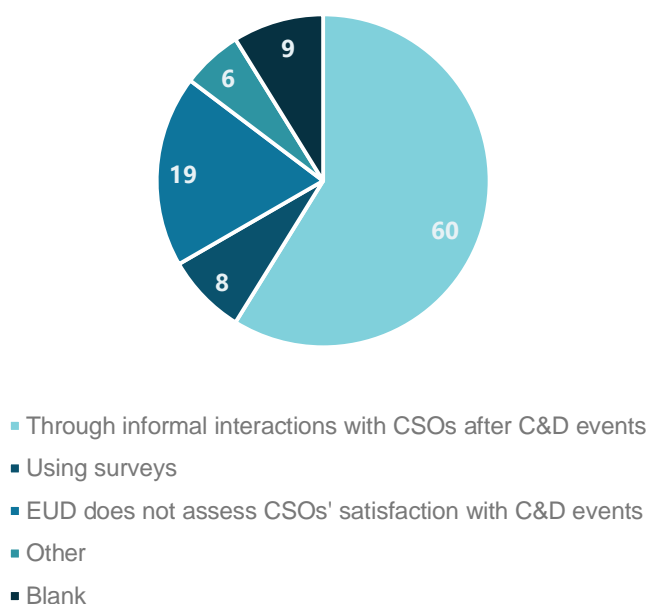


Figure 9: Tools used by EUDs in 2024 to get feedback from CSOs on their satisfaction with consultation and dialogue events

## 7. ENHANCING IMPACT THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

The survey shows that consultations and dialogue with CSOs are making a tangible contribution to EU strategies, policies, and programming. **17 EUDs reported that engagement with CSOs led to significant improvements**, underlining the transformative potential of structured consultations in areas such as policy reform, programme design, and government dialogue.

**A majority of 53 EUDs noted that consultations brought about some improvements.** This indicates that even where engagement may not be fully transformative, CSO input is consistently helping EUDs to adapt approaches, refine priorities, and build stronger relations with local stakeholders.

By contrast, **18 EUDs observed negligible or no changes**, suggesting either structural constraints, such as restrictive civic space, limited resources, insufficient quality of consultations, weak CSO participation, or political barriers, or that the impact of consultations may take longer to materialise in certain contexts. In addition, 12 EUDs marked “not applicable” or “do not know,” and 1 left the question blank, pointing to the need for continued capacity-building and clearer monitoring of consultation processes.

Overall, the findings highlight that in most cases, **CSO consultations are perceived as valuable drivers of change**, ranging from incremental adjustments to more significant strategic shifts. They also suggest that more consistent practices and enabling conditions are needed to ensure that consultations can achieve their full potential across all contexts.

The survey highlights several **key factors that explain why consultations with CSOs are having an impact**. The most frequently cited drivers are the **relevance of the CSOs** engaged in dialogue and the effective engagement of EUDs. Over 50 EUDs identified the former as critical: when CSOs represent meaningful constituencies and bring grounded evidence, their inputs carry more weight. Similarly,

**strong, and proactive facilitation by EUDs** ensures that consultations are not just symbolic but lead to real follow-up and policy influence.

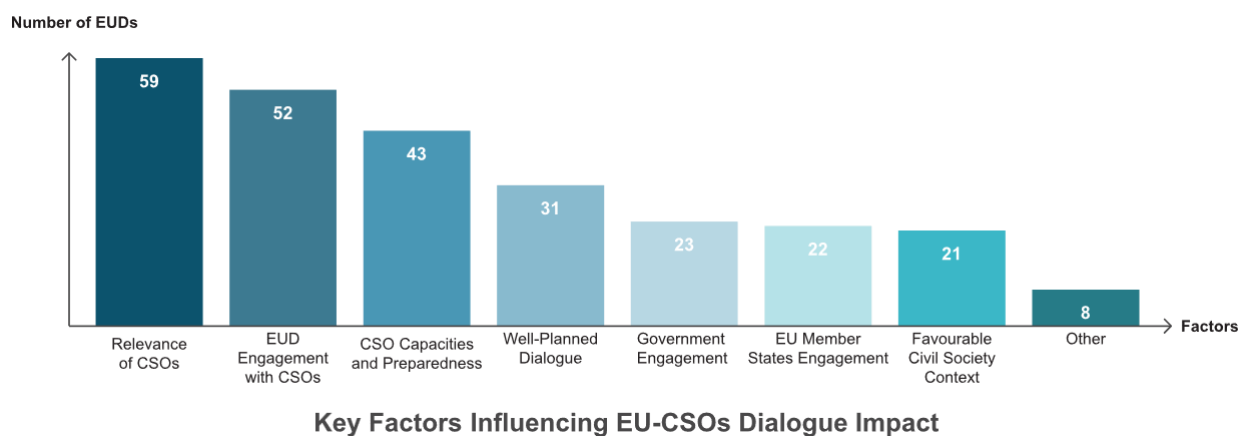


Figure 10: Key factors driving the impact of EU-CSO dialogue

Another major factor is the **capacity and preparedness of CSOs**, mentioned by 43 EUDs. Well-organised, technically capable CSOs are better positioned to engage in dialogue and provide actionable recommendations. Linked to this, **well-planned and prepared consultations were also identified as a significant element**, confirming that structure and clarity are essential for meaningful participation.

Other enabling elements include the **engagement of governments and EU MS in the dialogue process**, and the existence of a **favourable civil society context**. While cited less frequently, these external conditions can make a decisive difference in whether CSO contributions are heard and acted upon.

Taken together, the findings suggest that **impact is highest when three elements (the first three key factors in Figure 9) align: relevant and capable CSOs, structured and well-prepared consultation processes, and strong EUD leadership**. These factors can even help counterbalance less favourable political or civic environments.

## 7.1 How CSO consultations contribute to change

**Consultations and dialogue with CSOs** are not only a matter of inclusiveness; they **have a demonstrable impact on how the EU designs, implements, and adapts its strategies and programmes**. Evidence from EUDs shows that CSO engagement brings tangible improvements across multiple dimensions, ranging from shaping national policies and legal frameworks to influencing EU programming and project design, enhancing political dialogue, and strengthening the EU's credibility as a trusted partner.

The 10 areas below show how CSO consultations drive change, shaping laws and programmes, providing local insights, strengthening networks, and safeguarding civic space. They demonstrate that consultations are not one-off events but a continuous learning process that makes EU cooperation more inclusive, responsive, and legitimate, while reinforcing civil society's role in development and governance:



**1. CSOs shaping policy and legal frameworks.** *Through consultations, CSOs provide inputs that directly affect laws, policies, and the overall enabling environment, such as in:*

**Rwanda**, where CSO engagement around the 2024 NGO law helped curb restrictive provisions, leading to a less onerous registration process.

**Bangladesh**, where the Team Europe Civil Society Dialogue on the labour sector produced a final report with 45 recommendations from CSOs and trade unions, guiding government action on three priorities of the National Action Plan: strengthening freedom of association and labour law enforcement, promoting social dialogue, and eliminating child and forced labour.

**Belize**, where the EU in 2024 a) provided financial support to civil society to actively engage in the constitutional reform process through advocacy, nationwide consultations and the development of civil society position papers on priority reforms; and b) supported a Gap Analysis of Free Prior and Informed Consent practices that assessed capacities at inter-ministerial level to implement FPIC, before developing specialised FPIC trainings for government staff, indigenous leaders and CSOs.

**Afghanistan**, where EU consultations with CSOs played a constructive role in moving authorities to allow Afghan women to return to work in NGOs, securing space for their continued participation despite restrictions.

**2. Making EU programmes and funding more inclusive and responsive.** *Dialogue with CSOs ensures that EU strategies, programmes, and CfPs are adapted to local realities, more flexible, and accessible to diverse organisations, such as in:*

**Angola**, where, although health is not a priority sector, consultations, and evidence from CSOs highlighted critical gaps in nutrition. In response, the EUD launched a dedicated CfP to address these needs.

**Zimbabwe**, where feedback from CSOs outside the capital led the EUD to launch capacity building and Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) support tailored to Grassroot Organisations, easing grant requirements and widening access to EU funding.

**Seychelles**, where consultations with CSOs informed the design of CfP guidelines, helping set clearer priorities and adapt funding rules by lowering EU co-financing requirements to match local capacity.

**Namibia**, where CSOs actively shaped the AAPs and MIP and now participate in all steering committees, ensuring their input guides both planning and implementation.

**3. Strengthening political dialogue through CSO inputs.** *Consultations with CSOs provide evidence and perspectives that enhance EU credibility and influence in policy dialogue with governments, such as in:*

**Brazil**, where regular dialogue with CSOs feeds directly into the EUD's political engagement, informing the HoD's discussions with government.

**Argentina**, where the latest consultation with local CSOs was instrumental in shaping Team Europe's preparation for the human rights dialogue with the government.

**Cameroon**, where, when the government restricted NGO operations and access to funding, the EU drew on CSO data to demonstrate the severe social and economic consequences, strengthening its démarche with the authorities.

**Zimbabwe**, where EU consultations with CSOs contributed to successful advocacy with the government that secured civil society participation in the arrears' clearance dialogue (the process of negotiating repayment terms for Zimbabwe's external debt).





**4. Leveraging grassroots knowledge for conflict sensitivity** *Consultations with CSOs provide local insights that reveal emerging tensions and risks, helping the EU design programmes that are more responsive and conflict sensitive, such as in:*

**Somalia**, where consultations provided grassroots insights into community needs and potential tensions, such as land disputes and resource competition, enabling the EU to design AAPs and CfPs more responsive to marginalised groups, women, and minorities.

**Sierra Leone**, where consultations with a broad range of actors, including traditional leaders, faith-based organisations (FBOs), youth and women's networks, and human rights advocates, strengthened EU dialogue with national authorities and informed cooperation on decentralisation, GBV, harmful practices, and migration.

**Peru**, where engagement with WROs during the *Caso Manta*<sup>1</sup> trials deepened the EU's understanding of local power dynamics and historical abuses. CSO advocacy contributed to a landmark ruling that recognised sexual violence as crimes against humanity, while the EU's participation as an observer reinforced the importance of this process.

**Senegal**, where dialogue with CSOs not only increased the EU's visibility in remote regions such as Sédhiou but also ensured that community concerns guided cooperation. As a result, the NDICI-CSO country allocation was programmed based on recommendations from the April 2024 dialogue.

**5. Building CSO capacity and strengthening networks.** *EU engagement helps CSOs develop organisational capacities while fostering coalitions and networks that enhance their collective policy influence, such as in:*

**Thailand**, where consultations confirmed EU priorities for civil society and led to the launch of a CSO Academy under the Cooperation Facility, focusing on strengthening young organisations.

The **Caribbean**, where engagement with the Caribbean Policy Development Centre has grown post-COVID-19, with new tools such as the Civil Society Database boosting collaboration and capacity-building opportunities across the sector.

**Eswatini**, where consultations strengthened relations and improved CSO capacity through training in organisational, technical, and financial management, while fostering stronger consortia and coalitions for EU-funded projects.

In **Uruguay**, where EU support strengthened CSO capacities, enabling them to submit an alternative report to the UPR.







**6. Shaping outcomes in key sectors.** *Through consultations, CSOs influence EU action across priority areas such as gender, labour, migration, youth, decentralisation, and natural resources, such as in:*

**Lesotho**, where CSOs actively contributed to the drafting of the Inclusive Lesotho Action documents, providing inputs that shaped their content.

**Liberia**, where WROs and feminist movements shaped the gender action document, while CSO recommendations also informed programmes on elections and anti-corruption.

The **Dominican Republic**, where CSO consultations influenced EU project design and implementation. In the Comprehensive Programme for Tourism and Urban Development of the Colonial City, local associations secured adjustments, boosting legitimacy. In the *Migrasalud* project, migration-focused consultations strengthened CSO capacity and improved coordination with authorities on migrant health and rights.

**Cuba**, where, despite a restrictive civic space, CSOs have been pivotal in advancing gender equality and combating GBV. Through activism, community work, and public campaigning, amplified by EU engagement, they decisively contributed to the adoption of the country's current progressive legal framework.

**Colombia**, where CSOs engagement on youth issues led the government to invite the EU to chair the first International Cooperation Roundtable on Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Bolivia**, where EU consultations with CSOs expanded engagement in the UPR process and LGBTIQ issues, while also fostering a Roadmap for dialogue on lithium and closer coordination with EU MS.

**7. Building Structured Dialogue platforms.** *Consultations with CSOs lay the groundwork for regular, structured spaces that strengthen participation and align EU and Member State action, such as in:*

**Uganda**, where the EUD broadened consultations by engaging new partners (including on GG sectors like Transport, Climate), using a Team Europe approach with EU MS, and managing expectations through clearer communication.

**Guyana and Suriname**, where CSOs contributed to the design of a Structured Dialogue initiative now being finalised for implementation in both countries.

**8. Enhancing transparency, visibility, and trust.** *Consultations improve CSOs' access to information and funding opportunities, while reinforcing the EU's visibility and credibility as a trusted partner, such as in:*

**Cabo Verde**, where consultations opened new channels for information and participation, enabling CSOs to access EU and EU MS funding and to join policy forums. As a result, new organisations secured EU support, while others strengthened their advocacy on human rights and the social economy, expanding CSO involvement in both implementation and dialogue.

**Mozambique**, where dialogue and consultations reinforced the EU's role as a trusted partner and key reference point for CSOs.

**Mauritania**, where exchanges with civil society have strengthened understanding of the EU and improved dialogue with multiple stakeholders, with greater focus on youth and gender equality. Concrete progress is visible in human rights protection, where CSOs have become an indispensable link between survivors of GBV and support services.

**9. Safeguarding civic space in restrictive contexts.** *Even where civic space is shrinking, EU consultations with CSOs help secure incremental gains and safeguard participation, such as in:*

**Afghanistan**, where EU consultations with CSOs have secured small but significant wins in a restrictive context, speeding up project approvals, protecting partner CSOs, and pushing for Afghan women to be allowed to work in CSOs, including at border posts assisting returnees.

**Vietnam**, where, although the Domestic Advisory Group under the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement lacked independence, EU engagement with CSOs provided vital support to sustain their role and counter further regression of civic space.

**Nepal**, where EU consultations with CSOs have been key to countering restrictions on civic space, creating safe spaces for cooperation between national and international NGOs and raising CSO concerns in dialogue with government and partners.

**10. Continuous learning through consultations.** *Consultations are an ongoing process that inform strategies, guide project design, and enable adaptation throughout implementation, such as in:*

**South Sudan**, where consultations with CSOs shaped the GAP III CLIP and AAP 2025, while also informing project design and adapting implementation approaches.

The **Philippines**, where CSO consultations shape how the EU operates on the ground, setting priorities and guiding the agenda for capacity building.

**Papua New Guinea**, where EU programmes have integrated activities directly responding to needs highlighted by CSOs, ensuring actions reflect local priorities.

**Kenya**, where CSO consultations provided critical insights that led the EU to make FSTP mandatory in CfPs, ensuring greater inclusion of GROs.





## 8. CONCLUSION

**In 2024, consultations with civil society were near-universal: 99 of 102 EUDs engaged CSOs in at least one area, consolidating a culture of dialogue that has steadily expanded since 2021.** Local organisations remained the backbone of engagement (around 80%), while the composition evolved: community-based and grassroots actors accounted for 31% (down from 50% in 2023), private-sector-linked organisations rose sharply to 20% (from 7%), youth organisations increased to 18%, and women's rights groups held steady at 15%, with platforms and coalitions at 11%. Thematically, EUDs drew on a broad spectrum, from human rights and governance to climate, digitalisation, and investment-related issues, signalling a maturing ecosystem aligned with evolving EU priorities. Contribution of CSOs perceived by the surveyed EUDs remained strongest among human rights and governance actors (close to 70% rated strong), with social development organisations consolidating as high performers (nearly 90% medium or strong). Climate-focused and youth actors gained ground but still trail the most established interlocutors. Trade unions, rural and informal-economy organisations, and communities directly affected by projects remain comparatively marginal, underscoring persistent representation gaps. Youth CSOs continued to demonstrate value, while women's rights organisations sustained substantive influence across governance and social policy debates, continuities that echo last year's trajectory of consolidation of dialogue practices and widening diversity.

**Global Gateway engagement expanded in reach but is still incipient in practice.** 82 EUDs involved CSOs, yet most activity remained at the information-sharing stage, with fewer consultations at sector or project design level and least during implementation and monitoring. Energy, climate, and education/research stand out as the sectors with more targeted consultation, indicating where strategies are beginning to benefit from substantive civil society input. Among the 32 EUDs that did consult on GG, policy/governance, women's rights, and youth CSOs figured prominently, while workers' organisations, informal-economy groups, and critically citizens directly affected by projects were far less present. Many EUDs intend to strengthen the evidence base through civil society mappings, but these studies are still very limited; without them, engagement risks privileging already visible actors. Overall, the Global Gateway is emerging as a strategic arena for dialogue, but systematic inclusion across the project cycle, particularly of those closest to impacts, remains the key frontier.

**Engagement on NDICI–Global Europe remained well-institutionalised.** Consultations largely clustered around the AAPs (59 EUDs) and long-standing priorities such as governance, human rights and democracy, and gender equality (54 EUDs), while newer or more specialised areas, such as green alliances (26 EUDs), digitalisation (22), and migration (18) were less frequently addressed or considered context-specific. Qualitative evidence points to a gradual deepening of practice: EUDs are increasingly timing dialogue to strategic moments, linking it to recognised policy frameworks, and adopting adaptive formats in restrictive environments. The overall pattern confirms continuity with past years: a broadening of who is consulted and a slow but steady move from episodic to more purposeful exchanges, consistent with last year's finding that consultation is becoming a cornerstone of policy development and implementation.

**Approaches evolved incrementally.** Ad-hoc consultations still predominate (around half of all consultations by EUDs surveyed), regular formats remain stable (about a quarter), and Structured Dialogue grew modestly from a low base (7% in 2024, up from 6% in 2023). Political and high-policy dialogue continued to be a visible strength, often led by Heads of Delegation, reinforcing institutional commitment and creating influential entry points into national policy debates, continuities that align with last year's observation about the growing importance of political dialogue and HoD engagement. Multi-stakeholder approaches are taking root in a few countries, with early results pointing to strong potential for advancing civil society engagement in the Global Gateway.



**The quality of exchange improved, if unevenly.** A core group of 40 EUDs consistently practiced co-creation (joint agendas, pre-circulated materials, and structured feedback), with most others applying these features intermittently. Communication channels remained regular and multi-modal (in-person, virtual, hybrid), and standing working groups continued to matter. CSO satisfaction data suggest that while technical arrangements are not always optimal, content and opportunities for dialogue are generally well-rated; perceptions of EUD openness, hierarchy involvement, and follow-up show progress but still trail content-related satisfaction. The direction of travel is positive: more EUDs are moving from one-way consultation towards two-way, predictable dialogue that embeds feedback cycles, an evolution consistent with last year's shift from ad-hoc to more structured formats.

**Impact is now clearer and better evidenced.** 17 EUDs reported significant changes attributable to dialogue with CSOs, and a majority (53 EUDs) noted incremental improvements, ranging from legislative and policy shifts to more responsive programming, stronger political dialogue, and stronger protection for rights and communities in sensitive sectors. Case evidence shows CSO inputs shaping national reforms, tailoring CfPs and programme design, informing high-level EU engagement with governments, and anchoring learning across the project cycle, from strategy to implementation. The conditions for impact are increasingly well understood: relevant and representative CSOs, structured and well-prepared consultation processes, and visible, proactive EUD leadership. Where these align, dialogue moves beyond inclusion to demonstrable outcomes, an evolution that reinforces last year's central message: rising quality and frequency of consultation correlate with tangible policy and programmatic gains.

Looking ahead, the EU should ensure that dialogue spaces are genuinely inclusive and accessible, enabling CSOs, particularly those representing the most marginalised groups, to participate on an equal footing. As the Global Gateway moves into full implementation, dialogue with civil society must be placed at the heart of each initiative, alongside engagement with the private sector and other stakeholders. **These spaces should not only broaden participation but also provide a platform to address key concerns such as decent job creation, corporate accountability, environmental and , and community rights.** For investments to be truly transformative, contributing to global objectives while addressing deep-rooted inequalities in partner countries, they must be shaped above all by the voices and priorities of those most affected.



# APPENDIX 1

## Youth Engagement





## Youth Engagement – Valued and Institutionalised

In general, **Youth Sounding Boards (YSB)**; sometimes also referred to as Youth Advisory Structures/ YAS) serve the **purpose of enhancing youth engagement and inclusion in EUDs'** programmes and activities. Precisely, they shall advise EUDs on youth inclusion and empowerment; inform on youth needs and perspectives; support the EUDs to identify and better engage youth organisations and youth networks; provide a consultative space for youth to influence on EU's actions, advise /support in the design of the EU's future strategies and interventions, foster an inclusive **mechanism for Structured Dialogue between the EU and Youth** and when possible, government, in areas of EU key interest such as climate change, gender and social inclusion, and governance. Moreover, YSB shall **monitor /provide feedback and recommendations on current and future EU engagements**, provide information from a youth perspective. And lastly, YSB may inform and **serve as a knowledge hub to exchange information** and share ideas, engage in advocacy and communication activities on key issues related to youth, emerging trends and innovation, concerns, and opportunities. However, YSB should not substitute the inclusion of youth CSOs in consultations and dialogue with EUDs in the various spaces, from political to cooperation and trade. Youth CSOs represent the diverse, intersectional fabric of self-organised youth, which are critical voices in shaping EU policy and operations.

### Extent of Youth Sounding Boards across EU Delegations

By 2024, 36 out of the EUDs answering the survey reported having an operational YSB in place, often with established ToRs, structured workplans, and regular activities. A further 8 EUDs were in the process of setting up a YSB, while 27 indicated plans to establish one within the next 12 months. By contrast, 31 EUDs reported no plans to do so.

The overall picture is encouraging nearly seven out of 10 EUDs either have an operational YSB or are planning to establish one in the near future, signalling strong momentum. At the same time, the 31 EUDs without plans point to a need for further exploration of alternative youth participation models, or targeted support to overcome context-specific barriers such as political constraints, limited resources, or lack of institutional incentives.

### Spectrum of Maturity

YSBs are at very different stages across EUDs, ranging from well-established boards with multiple cohorts, to new initiatives still in the conceptual phase.

- **Operational YSBs** are typically anchored in EUDs' workplans, with clear membership criteria, diverse representation, and regular activities aligned with programming cycles.
- **In-progress YSBs** are close to operationalisation, but often delayed by contracting, budget approval, or political developments.
- **For planned YSBs, EUDs** are mapping youth stakeholders and defining thematic focus areas, often linked to new programming.
- **Discontinued or paused YSBs** highlight the importance of sustainability planning, as several cases show momentum lost due to lack of financing or political instability.

### Objectives and Membership

Despite their varied maturity, YSBs share common objectives:

- **Policy influence**, ensuring that youth perspectives inform EU decisions and programming.
- **Capacity-building, via** leadership development, building advocacy skills, strategic thinking, and policy literacy among members.





- **Representation**, reaching under-represented groups such as rural youth, women, persons with disabilities, and minorities.
- **Expanding engagement**, by supporting the EUDs to map youth organisations and network and promote meaningful and diverse youth engagement while at the same time supporting EUDs in preparing Youth CSOs to better understand contexts and processes.
- **Network-building**, connecting local youth movements with EU MS networks, regional boards, and thematic platforms.

Membership typically ranges between 9-30 individuals, with good practices including gender parity, quota systems for marginalised groups, term limits to refresh perspectives, and transparent recruitment through open calls and selection panels.

### Modes of Engagement

Operational YSBs increasingly move beyond static advisory roles towards active participation in EU processes. Examples include:

- **Thematic working groups** feeding into sectoral strategies (e.g. green transition, human rights, digitalisation).
- Participation in **field missions** with EUDs and MS.
- Contributions to **EU public diplomacy** through campaigns, events, and youth-led content.
- **Co-drafting** policy briefs, strategic notes, and recommendations.

In 2024, DEUs reported a total of **248 meetings** with YSB members, with activity levels ranging from a handful of introductory sessions to monthly or more frequent engagements. Policy areas most often discussed include youth empowerment and skills, environment and climate change, governance and democracy, digitalisation, peace and security, and gender equality.

### Financing and Support

Funding models vary widely. Some YSBs benefit from dedicated budgets (e.g. through service contracts), while others rely on hybrid support from EUDs' budgets and thematic projects, or partnerships with UN agencies and national youth councils. Budget limitations can constrain frequency of meetings, member participation (especially from rural areas), and longer-term sustainability. Continuity risks are particularly acute where YSBs are tied to project cycles rather than integrated into EUDs' core budgets.

### YSBs and Global Gateway

YSBs are increasingly linked to the GG agenda. In 2024, **boards in 22 countries participated in GG consultations, steering committees, or flagship events**. Contributions included reviewing Action Documents, providing youth-specific recommendations to programme design, and representing youth at GG events in Brussels and partner countries. These early experiences illustrate the potential of YSBs to strengthen inclusivity in GG sectors such as digitalisation, green transition, education, and governance.

### Perceived Value and Achievements

Across EUDs, YSBs are widely recognised as a constructive mechanism for integrating youth perspectives. Reported achievements include:

- **Influencing policy and programming** through advisory notes, recommendations, and input into MIPs and Roadmaps.
- **Building capacity and networks** via training in advocacy, digital skills, and financial management, and by linking youth movements nationally and regionally.



- **Raising visibility** of youth voices at EU and GG events, in media campaigns, and through youth-led outputs such as podcasts, competitions, and reports.
- **Co-creation of initiatives**, including youth-specific CfPs and thematic activities aligned with EUDs' priorities.

### Challenges and Constraints

Despite progress, several challenges persist:

- **Sustainability risks** if YSBs are not embedded in EUDs' strategies and budgets.
- **Geographic and inclusivity barriers**, particularly for rural or marginalised groups.
- **Retention and motivation**, as multi-year terms require continuous meaningful engagement.
- **Resource intensity**, with limited staff time and budgets constraining ambition.
- **Expectation management**, as misalignment between EUDs' and members can undermine trust.
- **Political sensitivity**, especially in restrictive environments where visibility can pose risks.

### Suggested Actions Going Forward

To increase the relevance of YSBs and maximise their contribution to GG implementation, suggested actions include:

- **Institutionalisation and early involvement**: embedding YSBs into EUDs' strategic cycles, sector dialogues, and steering committees.
- **Capacity strengthening**: targeted training on GG, EU processes, and advocacy, including cross-country peer learning.
- **Resources and sustainability**: securing dedicated budgets and maintaining focal points for continuity.
- **Communication and visibility**: ensuring YSB contributions are visible across all EUDs' sections and public diplomacy.
- **Inclusivity and representation**: broadening membership diversity and adapting models to local contexts.
- **Direct links to GG**: involving YSBs in design, monitoring and evaluating GG interventions, ensuring youth perspectives shape priority sectors.

### Overall Observations

YSBs vary greatly in maturity and scope, but they have become one of the most recognisable innovations in EU inclusive and meaningful youth engagement. Where embedded in EUDs' processes and supported with adequate resources, YSBs have demonstrated tangible contributions to programming, policy processes, public diplomacy, and GG initiatives. Ensuring sustainability, inclusivity, and institutionalisation will be essential to consolidating these gains and positioning YSBs as a cornerstone of EU–youth cooperation going forward.

# APPENDIX 2

## **Civil Society and business**



### CSO participation in private sector consultations – increasingly valued and institutionalised

In 2024, civil society organisations gained unprecedented visibility in EU Delegations' engagement with the private sector. 31 EUDs reported CSOs had participated in at least one business forum event, and another 27 are planning to do so in the next 12 months, signalling strong momentum. In 32 EUDs business fora do not exist yet, but CSOs are nonetheless involved in other consultation formats with the private sector. Only 1 EUD reports no plans to invite CSOs to events of the EUD business forum. 9 EUDs responded they do not know, while 2 left the question blank.

### Testimonies of EUDs that had enabled CSO participation in at least one event of the EUD's business forum in 2024

*"Business chambers have been actively engaged during the last business forum. The European Business Chamber was also organizing a B2B session for matching the European business with local business. Other representative of CSOs and Trade Union were invited either as guests or to intervene in some of the panels" (EUD Rwanda)*

*"Civil society organizations engaged in the public-private partnership forum dedicated to the administration of facilities funded by the European Union through various EU-funded projects at local level". (EUD Sierra Leone)*

*"Think tanks and youth groups with an interest in the energy transition have been involved in the Team Europe forum on the energy transition" (EUD Indonesia)*

*"CSOs were part of consultations and dialogue at the EU Namibia Business Forum, and they were invited to the forum itself. For the 2026 Business Forum there will even be a side event on green hydrogen. CSOs were also consulted in the framework of discussions around our strategic partnership with Namibia". (EUD Namibia)*

*"A Civil Society Dialogue was held during the mission of the Head of the Regional Trade Section in the context of the 13th Round of ESA EPA Deepening negotiations in the Comoros. The meeting brought together representatives from the Comorian private sector, civil society, government, and the European Union to discuss the implementation of the EPA and its impact on trade. Additionally, the Head of the Regional Trade Section carried out a mission to Mayotte as part of the 14th edition of the Economic Forum of the Indian Ocean Islands organised by Cap Business, where she spoke in a session on boosting trade with the European Union. As the forum brought together private sector representatives from the four Indian Ocean countries of the ESA5 group, along with participants from La Réunion and Mayotte, it provided an ideal opportunity to engage with regional businesses and Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI) to address trade-related challenges. In same year, the Trade Policy Officer of the Regional Trade Section met with private sector and civil society representatives in the Seychelles and Madagascar as part of the official annual mission". (EUD Mauritius)*

*"All relevant organizations with a focus on the private sector are invited to contribute into consultations and participate on business fora. Civil society is the basis of our Delegation's intervention. It is the calling card for all actions". (EUD Angola)*

*"Over 50 participants from civil society organizations took part in the EU-Nepal Business Forum 2024. These participants mainly included representatives from private sector associations, universities, energy and digital private associations, the tourism industry, and women and youth entrepreneurs. Many were involved in panel discussions that focused on the policy, legal, and regulatory environment, as well as investment opportunities in sectors such as energy, ICT, agriculture/manufacturing, recycling, tourism, and startups. CSOs also participated in the business and food fair organized alongside the forum, where over 60 European and Nepali businesses showcased their products and services, particularly European and Nepali food and Nepali coffee and tea". (EUD Nepal)*



### Why Some EUDs Lack Business Forums

Of the 32 EUDs that reported not having a business forum in place, the reasons vary. In some cases, alternative cases, alternative structures have been used (i.e. Chamber of European enterprises (EUD Benin), European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam). Elsewhere, CSOs are consulted on private sector approaches outside a business forum (EUD Chad). In more challenging contexts, forums have been **disrupted by hostility** (EUD Sudan), **constrained by closed political or economic environments** (EUD Turkmenistan), or made less relevant by a **limited European private sector presence** (EUD Lesotho, The Gambia). Finally, in certain cases, the **initiative rests with HQ**, such as preparations for an EU–AU Business Forum (EUD African Union).

### Towards Inclusive EU Business Fora

Civil society participation in private sector consultations is no longer a marginal practice. The survey reveals how several EU Delegations already **value and actively enable** CSOs to contribute to their business fora, recognising the legitimacy, accountability, and expertise they bring to discussions traditionally dominated by government and business actors. What is more, a significant number of Delegations that do not yet have a forum in place are also planning to establish one, with a clear intention to **institutionalise CSO participation** from the outset. This signals an important shift: rather than being occasional invitees, CSOs are increasingly seen as **relevant partners in shaping investment, trade, and sustainable business environments**.

This evolution is particularly relevant considering the **Global Gateway agenda**, which explicitly calls for **multi-stakeholder platforms** to guide transformative investments. By participating in such fora, CSOs help to ensure that private sector engagement is not only growth-oriented but also **socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and locally responsive**.

At the same time, important constraints remain. In contexts marked by restrictive or hostile political and economic environments, Delegations report that meaningful CSO participation is **difficult to organise or politically sensitive**. Limited private sector presence can also reduce the feasibility or relevance of setting up formal fora. These barriers underscore that progress is **uneven and context-dependent**, but the overall trend points to a progressive **normalisation of CSO involvement** in EU–private sector dialogue.

Looking ahead, **consolidating these practices will require a firm commitment to building genuinely inclusive spaces** that enable the participation of all relevant actors. Beyond ensuring the participation, **business fora must provide scope to address the issues CSOs raise**, such as how the private sector can act as a catalyst for job creation for poor and marginalised groups, including the youth, how corporate accountability practices can be reinforced, and how infrastructure investments can be made more transparent, accountable, and responsive to affected communities. Anchoring these dimensions in the dialogue will allow business fora to mature into platforms that not only promote investment but also advance equity, responsibility, and sustainability, thereby **aligning with the Global Gateway’s ambition** to deliver transformative, inclusive, and locally grounded outcomes.