

THE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

**Civil society perspectives on EU
Delegations consultations**

June 2026

ABOUT CONCORD

CONCORD is the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation. We are made up of 58 member organisations representing more than 2600 NGOs and are supported by millions of citizens across Europe.

We are the main interlocutor with the EU institutions on sustainable development policy and international cooperation. We are a member-led organisation which means that the members give the strategic direction of the Confederation.

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WHAT DO WE DO TO ACHIEVE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE?



Engage



Challenge



Innovate



Evolve

WHO WE ARE

26

**National
Platforms**

25

Networks

07

**Associate
Members**

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THANK YOU

We would like to thank every organisation and individual who participated in this project, in particular all civil society organisations in EU partner countries who dedicated time to answer our questions and/or contributed at any point in any form to this project.

CONSENT AND DO NO HARM

Respondents provided explicit consent to be quoted in this paper. We prioritised a do no harm approach and decided not to name respondents or their organisations in order to avoid any repercussions on them, although some respondents indicated they would be willing to share their feedback openly.

Are you a local CSO or platform and would you like to share your experience of consultations with us, or feedback on this paper? Get in touch!

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Access our meaningful engagement platform → [here](#).



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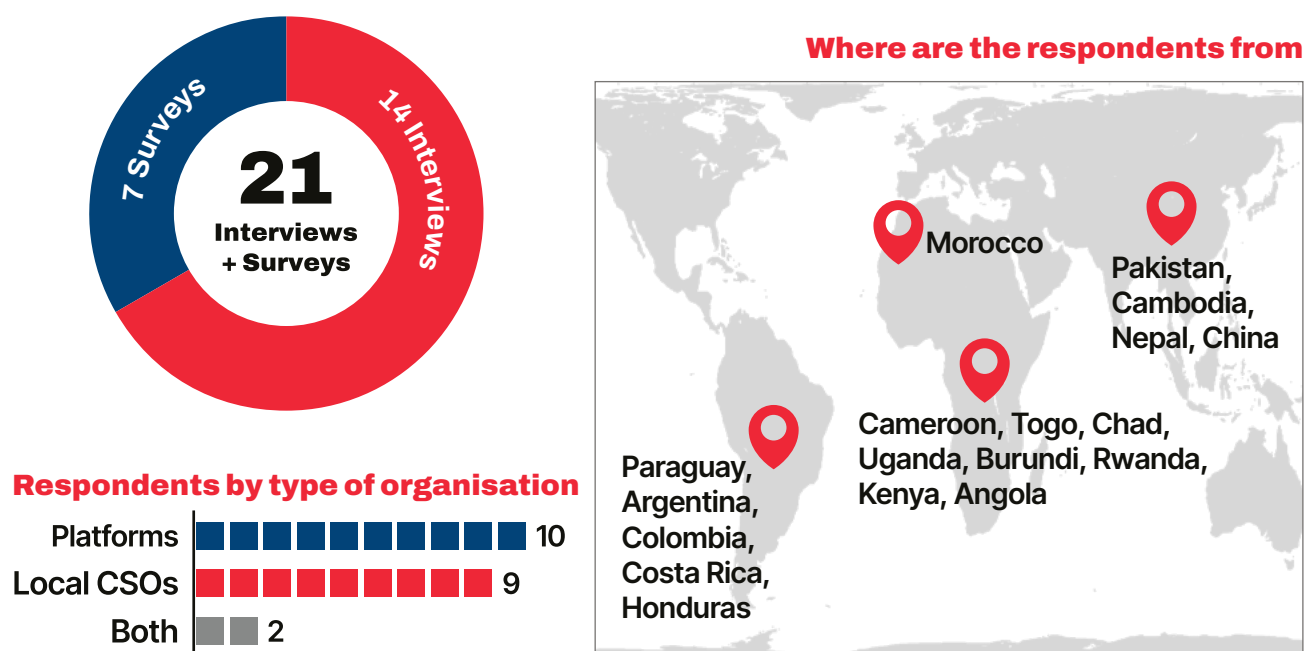
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Background and methodology	6
1. Co-creation	11
2. Information-sharing	15
3. Diversity and inclusion	18
4. Feedback loops	20
Small steps to strengthen meaningful engagement	23
Our members	25

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, CONCORD published a paper gathering seven practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making.¹ These seven practices define what we mean by a meaningful engagement of civil society, have been recognised by and guide our interaction with the European Union (EU). To get a better understanding of how the EU is implementing the seven practices, especially in consultations with civil society in its partner countries, we launched a meaningful engagement platform in 2025 with two objectives: a space to share knowledge with and among civil society organisations (CSOs) to support their engagement with the EU, and a survey to gather their experience of consultations with EU delegations. The survey focuses on four key elements: **information sharing, co-creation, inclusion and diversity, and feedback loops**.² This paper presents the experiences shared by civil society during the seven months following the launch of the platform (October 2025 to April 2026).

Through showcasing good practices and concrete, actionable suggestions from the perspective of local CSOs, this paper aims to support continuous dialogue with the EU in Brussels and with EU delegations. We hope to strengthen the meaningful engagement of civil society, in view of the next programming process in EU partner countries following the adoption of the new EU budget (2028-2034).



¹ CONCORD "7 practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making", October 2022.

² Practice 3, 4, 5 and 7 from CONCORD's [2022 paper](#)

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

About the project

CONCORD's Meaningful Engagement project seeks to contribute to the quality and meaningfulness of the dialogue between the EU and civil society. It is supported by our meaningful engagement platform, launched in 2025.³ This is a space to share resources among civil society on how to engage with the EU, and includes a survey to gather civil society's experience of consultations in order to share recommendations with the EU grounded in these experiences, good practices, and the expectations of local civil society in EU partner countries.

Collaboration with civil society partners

The project included collaboration and exchanges with civil society in EU partner countries:



The project including webinars and all resources we produced was conducted fully in three languages, English, French and Spanish, for better accessibility.

³ Visit our meaningful engagement platform here <https://presidency.concordeurope.org/meaningfuleengagement/>

METHODOLOGY

This final product presents the results of our meaningful engagement project for the past seven months (October 2025-April 2026).

We chose to focus on four out of seven practices from CONCORD's paper "seven practices for civil society participation in EU decision-making."⁴

- Information-sharing
- Co-creation
- Diversity and inclusion
- Feedback

We used two ways to gather inputs:

- A survey: to gather inputs about specific consultations. Responses were screened against our eligibility criteria (see below).
- Semi-structured interviews: to dig deeper into our four priority areas, either by following up with survey respondents, or by reaching out to local civil society organisations within our networks. They were selected based on their engagement with EU delegations, as well as to ensure geographical diversity within the sample.

We used a thematic analysis in order to identify trends across the various data gathered, which also allowed us to identify themes beyond the four areas originally identified. We used the software Atlas.ti to help us organise and analyse the data, without using the integrated AI tool.

Eligibility criteria:

- Belonging to a local CSO or CSO platform based in an EU partner country;
- Representation of diverse geographical contexts.

⁴ 2022 paper [available here](#).

Limitations and challenges

- While this was not the focus of our research, we acknowledge that dialogue between EU delegations and civil society also happens outside of formal consultations and contributes to meaningful engagement.
- Despite our dissemination plan and outreach efforts, it was difficult to mobilise a significant number of CSOs and to reach them at the right moment to gather their feedback on specific EU consultations. The experiences represented in this paper illustrate CONCORD's original recommendations from 2022 and provide a set of ideas to inspire and foster discussions and should be contextualised.
- Participants come from different contexts each with their own challenges for CSO engagement. As pointed out in the EU's own report on EU delegations' engagement with civil society (2023) "no single approach suits all situations".⁵
- While we gathered in total 13 responses from CSOs in EU partner countries through our survey, we had to set aside a few based on the eligibility criteria described above, or due to incomplete information. The survey respondents with whom we also conducted an interview are only counted once (no-double counting).

→ While we really hoped to include the views of organisations representing various groups, such as women's rights organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities, and youth organisations, we did not have the capacity to secure interviews. Therefore, the papers' insights from these constituencies are limited. However, this is an important part of CONCORD's work, carried by our Equality project and mainstreamed throughout thematic areas.

What do we mean by consultations?

A consultation is a formal process where the EU institutions ask for the opinions, feedback, or input of different groups (stakeholders) on laws, policies, or initiatives. They help ensure transparency and legitimacy in EU decision-making by incorporating diverse perspectives, including those from CSOs.

⁵ DG INTPA, Civil Society Consultations in Partner Countries - Report on EU delegations' Engagement with Civil Society 2023

Context

Nevertheless, this paper is published at a time where the partnership between the EU, its partner countries, and civil society is in evolution. Therefore, it is important to consider the following points of context:

→ The EU's Global Gateway strategy is reshaping the EU's partnerships and the role of civil society in these partnerships. The annual reports on EU delegations' engagement with civil society¹⁰ provide helpful recommendations on expanding dialogue in the framework of Global Gateway, while recognising that this dialogue is still in early stages. CONCORD proposed additional recommendations in a recent paper "Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Global Gateway".¹¹ The new generation Civil Society Roadmaps will include an increased focus on engaging civil society in dialogues on Global Gateway, particularly in the five sectors: digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research.

→ In parallel, the EU announced a reorganisation of EU delegations to be implemented by September 2026. This will lead to the creation of six regional hubs and the reduction or elimination of cooperation sections in more than twenty delegations. This raises questions about the future engagement of civil society.

→ Finally, the EU is currently negotiating its next seven-year budget (2028-2034). CONCORD

A solid basis for civil society engagement

Since 2021, the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) has been leading efforts to strengthen the meaningful engagement of civil society:

→ **An annual survey sent to EU delegations** to map their engagement with civil society and identify points of attention. The outcomes are published in public reports.⁶

→ **Guidance and good practices supporting EU delegations** to develop the fourth generation of Civil Society Roadmaps.⁷

This work is rooted in the European Commission 2012 Communication

"The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations"⁸ which sets the basis for Civil Society Roadmaps and is highlighted as a key policy framework in the recent [EU strategy for civil society](#).⁹ Civil society focal points in EU delegations play a key role in implementing this framework in practice, and the EU has been promoting a whole-of-delegation approach to support the engagement with civil society.

6 DG INTPA, Civil Society Consultations in Partner Countries - Report on EU delegations' Engagement with Civil Society [2023](#) and [2024](#)

7 The roadmaps are available [here](#). Some may not be published due to more sensitive contexts.

8 European Commission, Communication "[The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations](#)", 2012.

9 European Commission Communication "[EU strategy for civil society](#)", 2025

10 DG INTPA, [2023](#) and [2024](#)

11 CONCORD, "[Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Global Gateway: Meaningful engagement with civil society](#)", March 2026. This paper is also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

has consistently called for the EU “to preserve its commitment to Official Development Assistance (ODA) principles, inclusive partnerships, and local ownership by including clear safeguards for promoting and supporting the role of CSOs in the Global Europe Instrument”,¹² as well as provided additional insights and recommendations to guarantee direct and equitable access to EU funding for local CSOs in its report “Who still holds the lion’s share?”.¹³

Based on this context, while it is not yet clear how the programming process for the next EU budget will be organised, all these different pieces of CONCORD’s work aim to contribute to the meaningful and inclusive engagement of CSOs.

Meaningful engagement beyond practicalities

In our interviews, we asked respondents what meaningful engagement means to them and what is the most important to them. Beyond the practical aspects presented in this paper, a few respondents stressed that meaningful engagement is an integral part of an enabling environment for civil society, whereby:

- the local civil society ecosystem is supported including through flexible, core funding;
- the EU supports the citizens’ agenda and stands up for democracy and human rights;
- the EU demonstrates that it values local civil society, their knowledge and expertise.

“We seek their support, not financial support, but support in the sense that they can be a support for civil society in case their rights are affected”. (Argentina)

“My one, very straightforward message is that we really trust the values based on democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. [...] I also wish that there would be a kind of open communication, a transparent communication on such kinds of things”. (Pakistan)

¹² CONCORD, Analysis of the European Commission’s proposal for the EU’s next Multiannual Financial Framework and the Global Europe Instrument, December 2025.

¹³ CONCORD, “Who still holds the lion’s share?”, March 2026.

1. CO-CREATION

"I believe this will be a space for mutual exchange, where we will need to learn from the European Union, but where the European Union can also learn from us. It will help to provide a clear picture of the reality of the country. But it is also a space where we can build something together, something that will stand the test of time. I believe this would provide a framework for sharing information, assessing each other's progress, and then developing strategies for capacity-building and cooperation in both the short and long term". (Burundi)

Support from the leadership

In three interviews, respondents shared that the consultations were attended by the Head of the EU delegation, the Ambassadors of EU Member States (for example France, Germany, Luxembourg), the EU Member State development agencies, and at times the Head of Cooperation of the EU delegation. This engagement with decision-makers and the joint Team Europe approach is valued by respondents. Respondents in Chad, Burundi, Paraguay and Cambodia mentioned the importance of multistakeholder dialogues: *"To discuss water or energy, you need all stakeholders, because it's not only [managed] by CSOs, by the government or private sector. So, you need all stakeholders to discuss and take action based on our role and mandate to contribute effectively for the community". (Cambodia)*

According to respondents, the EU delegation in their country organises at least one annual or bi-annual general consultation with civil society. In some instances, respondents were only involved in dialogue with the EU delegation regarding specific calls for proposals ('calls') or when they were in the process of implementing an EU-funded project.

→ Respondents appreciate the opportunity to have strategic dialogues, thematic dialogues, and dialogues related to programming or contributing to the design of specific calls. They also mentioned the need for information sessions about the EU's strategies (including Global Gateway) and priority sectors in their country.

Agenda and format

Most of the time, the agenda is pre-determined by the EU, except in Cambodia where respondents shared that *"it's not only the EU that sets the agenda, but also the CSOs can raise what we want"*.

The purpose of the consultation and how the inputs will be used was not always clear for CSOs: some reported there was no clear explanation, prior to or during the session. For the respondents that reported clear communication on the aims of the dialogue, the processes it was going to influence and the expected outcomes, it supported their engagement and allowed them to follow the process afterwards.

The format is, in the majority of cases, a presentation from the EU delegation followed by a Q&A and space to share recommendations.

→ CSOs appreciate the open space to be heard, to ask questions and raise comments as part of the format: *“we went directly into the topic and discussed the issues at length, because they were keen to hear our views on what was currently happening” (Togo).*

However, the methodology is not always the most conducive: *“the space for dialogue was not designed to encourage conversation and exchange. The methodology was not appropriate, as the panel discussions did not facilitate meaningful dialogue” (Costa Rica).* Respondents shared various options for improvements:

→ *“We would like to see how this engagement, this consultation, can be more structured and regular. It can be thematic: maybe one meeting on education, one on agriculture, one on infrastructure, [...] We also have regular consultations with our members and the citizens they are serving to see how these EU priorities can meet our constituencies’ priorities as well” (Kenya)*

→ *“I recommend that, for specific topics, work be carried out over a certain period with those organisations that deal specifically with the subject or theme on which the European Union would like to have a clear opinion, perspective and so on”. (Cameroon)*

→ *“Maybe they need to provide multiple participation formats for the consultation. For example, it would be convenient if they let NGOs submit some written submissions. [...] They can also maybe pre-record a video or voice statement, this is also another option. And they can also organise some small group break-out discussions.” (China)*

Shaping EU action together

The overall experience of co-creation and the perceived ability to have an impact on EU priorities varied among respondents. Some shared limitations: *“We have taken part in consultations at the European Union’s offices. However, the format of these consultations left*

Co-creating the terms of reference of a Global Gateway project

In Paraguay, the EU delegation organised a consultation to shape a project connected to the Global Gateway in the city of Lambaré. After sharing information about Global Gateway, and the project for which the EU delegation wanted to open a call, the discussion was opened to participants on what had to be taken into account when drafting the terms of reference. Participants shared their ideas, shaping the activities that were later included in the call for proposals: *“we checked the terms of reference and saw that everything we’d been saying was actually in there”. Overall, the format of the session and the large diversity of participants were “interesting because you get to see other people’s perspectives – things you wouldn’t have thought of yourself [...] It was genuinely something new. And there was a great deal of knowledge-sharing because it was a mix of professions: there were lawyers, civil engineers, foresters, agronomists, architects – a bit of everything – and it resulted in a spectacular creation”.*

us feeling unsatisfied because they come with a pre-determined agenda. And certain paradigms that shape that agenda, too. And we're expected to think within that framework without stepping outside it." (Morocco), while others shared good practices and positive experiences.

In the context of consultations linked to programming, preparing calls, or dialogue linked to ongoing projects, respondents particularly

highlighted the importance of being able to have a two-way dialogue with mutual learning, where civil society can share the challenges they face: *"This space is not just about us learning from the European Union, but also about the European Union learning from us; together, we are building a system that is multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder."* (Burundi). As highlighted in CONCORD's 2026 report *"Who still holds the Lion's Share?"*, local CSOs continue to face

Co-creating the Civil Society Roadmap in Cambodia

The EU delegation reached out to one of the respondents, a CSO platform in Cambodia, for support in identifying and inviting all stakeholders who should be interviewed by the consultants hired to draft a study for the new Civil Society Roadmap. This included civil society as well as private sector actors with a focus on the energy and water sectors. The platform identified CSOs that work at the provincial, local and national level, and shared the list with the EU, the EU then added other stakeholders and made a selection. The platform was then responsible for coordinating civil society at the local level and contacting the local government to interview with the consultants hired by the EU.

This process was supported with adequate financial and human resources: the consultants hired for this process had a budget for accommodation, travel and per diems to support the effective inclusion of civil society. They were a team of two, including a Cambodian person who spoke Khmer and was responsible for collecting input at the local level.

The process was organised with a clear timeline shared with participants. It started in October 2025, and the interviews were organised in February 2026, leaving the time for all actors to be mobilised. At different points during the process, the EU focal point in Cambodia also provided a brief about the Global Gateway. In March 2026 the EU conducted a feedback meeting to validate the information, findings and recommendations for the CSO roadmap. Eleven CSOs attended this meeting: *"It is important for the CSOs so that they know the priorities, how they can engage in the roadmap and bring the benefits to the community and to their society".* Participants suggested that this feedback also be shared at the local level.

Finally, the results are expected in May and the call for proposals associated with this exercise will be published in October 2026. *"The process I think for me is transparent enough, all the information is already shared in public." "I appreciate the process that makes it more inclusive and more meaningful for us".*

barriers to access EU funding and develop partnerships with the EU due to the complexity of the rules and procedures, grants with large sums of money to manage, and lack of flexible, core funding to support their activities:

“At present, there is no other international aid donor whose application form is as complex, as difficult to complete and as time-consuming as that of the European Union.”(Argentina).

→ To face this challenge, respondents recommended on the one hand simplifying access to funding to enable more locally led development. On the other hand, they suggested more capacity-building. This concerned, for example, strengthening local CSOs' understanding of the requirements of calls for proposals and how to respond to them, including how to use the online system (PADOR). In addition, a few organisations underlined the importance of mutual exchanges among CSOs and supporting platforms which provide space for knowledge-sharing and capacity-strengthening to their members.

Finally, some respondents suggested that the EU could provide better visibility of the expertise of the EU and its Member States present in partner countries. Information sessions or providing an overview of the role of various actors of Team Europe in a given country could support CSO interventions and engagement, especially in Global Gateway projects.

2. INFORMATION-SHARING

When it comes to learning about consultations, respondents usually reported being contacted directly by the EU via email, albeit in some cases they found out through other organisations and networks. For the direct outreach, the EU usually draws contacts from organisations who have or are currently implementing an EU-funded project.

→ Direct contact was considered the ideal, usually via email, as many respondents reported. The use of context-adequate channels also came up, as one respondent shared that indigenous communities in Paraguay did not use email, but preferred WhatsApp.

According to the respondents, the content of email invitations usually was limited to practical information for the consultation (in-person/online, date, time) and the topic that would be covered.

→ The invitation should go beyond practical information and contain the programme, background information, preparatory documents, and clear aims and expected outcomes of the session.

A few respondents mentioned that information sessions were held before consultations or upon opening calls for proposals, or to present significant initiatives or strategies (for example, the Global Gateway). For others, much of the information was provided during the consultations themselves. This approach may hinder participants from coordinating with other

CSOs to prepare their inputs. Respondents also reported that doubts, questions, and comments came up after the consultation had concluded, and had to be solved by doing their own research.

→ Sharing more comprehensive information before consultations to provide enough time for participants to understand, research, consult internally and prepare inputs and questions is a good practice.

A key finding that emerged was that while consultations on concrete topics were relatively common, very few respondents reported systematic information-sharing on the bigger picture and strategy of the EU in their country.

→ *"It is not only about projects. Even when there are no calls for proposals, [we want] to know what the EU investment is doing in the country and to see how we can connect the community's priorities with EU investment. Having this kind of information can be [helpful]. [...] A list of projects that say that the EU is funding projects A, B, C, and D, where and with which budgets. This kind of information will be very helpful for CSOs, because it can allow us to follow-up to see what kind of impact those projects are making on the life of citizens." (Rwanda)*

Consistency through staff changes was also a point raised by some respondents, which can be particularly relevant ahead of the restructuring of the EU delegations. Three of them indicated their

engagement with EU delegations and access to information was dependent on the staff, and in one case information was lost when the CSO focal point changed.

→ Create structured processes that are not staff-dependent, and by providing handovers that include relationships with civil society to ensure a sustained relationship with CSOs.

Beyond direct engagement, the majority of CSOs reported accessing information through monitoring websites (general EU pages, pages

of the EU delegation, or EU Member States development agencies – such as Enabel).

Respondents flagged that the information can be difficult to find, and changes in the websites make information even more difficult to track.

→ Keep the official website of the EU delegation current, make sure they are consistently updated with comprehensive information. Respondents also proposed the creation of an alert system or mailing lists by area of intervention to avoid missing out on updates or deadlines.

Information-sharing on the Global Gateway

We asked the interview respondents about their understanding and access to information on the Global Gateway. The general perception of respondents indicates that it is a very complex topic that remains difficult to understand. However, they had very diverse experiences:

- 3 respondents were not aware of it – all in Africa
- 4 respondents knew about it, yet their information had not come from the EU but from other sources (e.g. own research, networks, other actors) – Africa and Asia
- 2 respondents had learned about it during a consultation, explained in the information section before opening the floor – both from Latin America
- 4 respondents recall participating in dedicated sessions where the strategy was presented – three in Africa, one in Asia

→ The other respondents did not answer the question.

The insights from those who participated in dedicated sessions are also remarkably diverse. In one case, it was a discussion in the National Civil Society Week. However, the complexity of the topic and lack of background information seemed to create a disconnect between the speaker and the audience: *“Last year in the National Civil Society Week there was a discussion on the Global Gateway. [...] And you have this international expert presenting it. Now, if I got confused, what about the other local actors? [...] If myself, who is a little bit exposed, I got lost, how about that CSO who has not had that exposure?” (Uganda)*

In the case of Cambodia, Global Gateway was presented by the CSO focal point at different stages of the process of renewal of the Civil Society Roadmap. The EU also joined engagements organised by civil society to explain the topic. This gave a chance to address organisations that might have not been reached by the EU directly, and facilitated CSO

understanding: *“During the presentation that I joined in February and March, at the beginning of the presentation, the EU focal point in Cambodia provided a brief about the Global Gateway. This was before the EU Civil Society Roadmap in Cambodia, to align with that. [...]. And we also invited the EU to participate in our event to present about the Global Gateway and the priorities of the EU. [...] It’s important that CSOs understand the priorities of the EU.”* (Cambodia)

The respondents from Togo and Chad attended the same regional session, a two-day multi-stakeholder meeting in Yaounde which created a space to ask questions, and hold open discussions: *“It’s been positive that we’ve at least heard about Global Gateway, which is a major funding instrument [...] And they’ve provided us with information and a number of resources. So for me, it’s been an eye-opener. Today, I’m talking about Global Gateway simply because I’ve heard of it – that’s all. But those who haven’t heard of it don’t understand.”* (Chad)

- To support information sharing about Global Gateway, respondents recommended the creation of designated sessions to explain the strategy and its implications in the country and on CSOs: *“I hope that the European delegation can arrange sensitisation sessions with civil society, the private sector, and the local industries, because all of them are very much connected with the agenda related to the Global Gateway.”* (Pakistan).
- It also seemed that even when sessions were held, the complexity of the strategy made it difficult to comprehend. The creation and sharing of a country-specific briefing or summary of the strategy and its implications previous to the engagement could support organisations to come in more prepared and use the space for discussion. Dissemination of existing materials such as the INTPA Academy Global Gateway toolkit, or the creation of a Global Gateway information hub with a specific focus on CSOs could also support capacity building.¹⁴

¹⁴ To go further, see CONCORD’s [2026 paper](#), also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

3. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The language used during consultations, and the language of the documents that are shared (before and after) remains a key element for the inclusion of local civil society. It is less of an issue in Spanish and French-speaking countries as the EU delegation staff usually speaks these languages. The issue of using too much EU jargon was only mentioned once.

→ In China, the EU delegation has used interpreters, but it is not always the case. In Cambodia, the EU delegation worked with a team of consultants to develop the Civil Society Roadmap including a local staff who spoke both English and Khmer, and who was responsible for collecting input from local CSOs. In Nepal, the CSO platform sometimes supports the EU delegation's engagement with local CSOs and ensures interpretation itself. It is good practice to offer the option of speaking the country's language: *"A couple of [EU] delegation members do understand Urdu, but most of the time we were communicating in English. So this is an important point. It is not announced that people can talk in the national, local language."* (Pakistan)

Beyond the question of language and interpretation, respondents were generally not aware of specific accessibility measures offered by EU delegations to include a diversity of participants in consultations, such as covering the cost of travel to the capital for in-person consultations. One respondent pointed out that these kinds of measures were more visible in the case of local CSOs' engagement at regional or

global level (for example to attend a meeting in Brussels or at the UN), than when EU delegations organise a consultation in a country.

→ However, it is important to note that while we really hoped to include the views of organisations representing various groups, such as women's rights and youth organisations, and organisations of indigenous people and persons with disabilities, we did not have the capacity to secure interviews. Therefore, the paper's insights from these constituencies are limited, but would deserve a lot more attention as they face additional and specific barriers to participation.

Organising consultations with specific groups such as platforms, local national CSOs, local regional or grassroots CSOs, or at various levels - national, regional, provincial - beyond the capital and project areas, was raised by some respondents as a positive approach. Respondents also appreciate multiple options for participation (online meetings, in person meetings, online surveys, the possibility of sharing written inputs afterwards). Only a few respondents mentioned that the consultations tend to always involve the same actors, especially those who are currently involved in EU projects or have been awarded projects in the past, and international NGOs rather than smaller ones.

→ Two respondents mentioned it could be interesting to have a database or a mapping of CSOs for the EU to better understand the civil society landscape in its partner countries.

The issue of safety was raised only twice, each time with a different angle. One respondent raised the importance of confidentiality, another the importance of creating a safe space. A safe space is *“where you feel like there’s a positive perception towards what you’re saying, and then the ability to understand the context [...] and then the culture of open communication and transparency” (Uganda)* which includes ensuring that the purpose of the consultation and how the information will be used is clear to the participants.

4. FEEDBACK LOOPS

Some respondents shared doubts about whether their inputs would shape outcomes. This seemed to reduce the turnout in consultations, particularly of local and grassroots organisations with limited capacity/resources. In fact, sixteen respondents reported not receiving regular and consistent feedback, and only one was satisfied with the communication cycle.

Usually, organisations who have followed a consultation process find out about the outcome and impact by themselves, or it is shared within networks. This could be improved by direct communication of these outcomes. This direct type of feedback was only experienced by the Cambodian respondents and was very positively perceived. Respondents suggested the following to improve feedback practices:

- After consultations, provide follow-up communication with a collection of all ideas shared and key takeaways. Ensure results are accessible to all participants, including the interpretation/translation into all relevant languages (see point on accessibility above). An explanation should also be provided on what will and will not be taken on board, and why: *"I want to receive some final document (maybe a one-page document) where I can see what recommendations they haven't accepted and why they haven't accepted them [...] I think this will encourage not only me but also other NGOs to join these consultations."* (China)
- To increase transparency, outline the next steps with clear timelines, establishing a clear link between the consultation and the outcomes. For example, the respondents from

Cambodia reported as good practice that the EU delegation clearly outlined when the results of the consultation were going to be shared and when the related call for proposals was going to be published. Where applicable/suitable, this could be presented in an action plan, but also in direct follow-up actions. For example, in Uganda a respondent recalls *"we had a side meeting with [the EU] and then they took it up and sent out a survey as soon as we were back in our respective countries. [...] As soon as we left the African Union, and we were back in Uganda, we were able to get a survey from the EU."*

- Consider the most appropriate format to share feedback. Importantly, respondents highlight that feedback should be provided at the same level that insights are collected (e.g. if the consultation was held at the local level, the feedback should be shared with CSOs who provided inputs at that level).
- Lastly, respondents expressed their wish to stay updated and in dialogue after the consultation. This included receiving notice once the final outputs were published, to see the impact of their participation, and the outcomes of follow-up actions. For example, if results have been shared with decision-makers (e.g. governments or other authorities), receiving the reactions to their inputs: *"I think it is important whether the government responds positively or not. But [what is most important] it's the effort that the EU makes to bring us the feedback, the results."* (Cambodia).

Local CSOs and platforms are active drivers of change

While our research focused on how the EU can improve its consultations, it goes without saying that local civil society and CSO platforms are also taking a proactive approach towards EU delegations. Some examples were shared by the respondents in at least five interviews, including initiating dialogues with the EU delegation about a priority, inviting the EU delegation to talk about its priorities and Global Gateway to the members of a platform, or approaching the EU about a project idea: *"We can get a sense of the kinds of interventions that could be implemented and that would benefit the recipients, because we're on the ground. We can really see the problems that need solving, whether that requires a quick fix or a long-term solution. Here too, we have this approach: sometimes we'll initiate a discussion, but we'll also ask whether there might be an opportunity for collaboration in this regard".* (Burundi)

Civil society platforms and networks play a key role in connecting the EU delegation to various local CSO actors, helping to strengthen the capacity of multiple CSOs, and in all of the four practices covered by this paper:

→ **To identify the right participants** for a consultation: *"Mostly when the regional office or in-country office conduct a meeting, because [we are] a membership-based organisation [...] they consult with us about who should join the meeting to represent all sectors. We propose around 8 to 10 or 15 participants so that they can share their ideas".* (Cambodia)

→ In order to **reach local CSOs** and to make the consultation accessible: *"Sometimes we arrange some provincial consultations [...] And sometimes [...] they want to go and we may arrange some meetings with some part of the countries, but [...] Normally it's like, you know, they speak in English, but we sometimes interpret and sometimes even they have no interpreters. And so we manage."* (Nepal)

→ **To disseminate information** linked to the consultation or the EU's actions and calls: *"We normally share the information with our members through a database, that's the way we communicate on a regular basis. We share it not only with our member organisations, but with other NGOs as well, because we have different networks where we meet, when we come together to strategise for advocacy, for engagement at different levels. We have a network at the national level, but we even go down to the district level."* (Rwanda)

→ **To support knowledge exchange** and strengthen civil society's capacity: *"Our members' expertise enables them to act as mentors for networks and associations, whilst helping them to develop their capacities and local and regional skills, and to build the expertise of their stakeholders in their local areas"* (Morocco)

Civil society platforms encouraged the EU delegations to collaborate more with them:

→ *"You could even co-convene the consultations. As the EU, you could work with a local actor at a country level to do the consultations. So dialoguing, co-convening with local actors to roll the consultations".* (Uganda)

→ *“The European delegation, in partnership with us, could reach out to many more organisations, including by ensuring that local organisations become aware of the Global Gateway, so that they can share their views [...] So I think they could also make use of the kinds of opportunities that are always created by civil society. Argentina has a very active civil society” (Argentina)*

SMALL STEPS TO STRENGTHEN MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

The experiences gathered through this project show that meaningful engagement with EU delegations is deeply valued by local civil society organisations and play a key role in building strong partnerships.

The recommendations in this section are drawn directly from the experiences of local CSOs in partner countries regarding consultations with EU delegations. They cover the full consultation cycle (before, during, and after) and reflect the four areas explored in this paper: co-creation, information-sharing, inclusion and diversity, and feedback loops.

The resulting list presents good practices and concrete, actionable recommendations to support and strengthen the ongoing dialogue between CSOs and the EU, in Brussels and in delegations.

We recognise that country contexts differ significantly, and not all recommendations will be applicable in every setting. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, this short document should serve as a practical tool for inspiration
→ **for CSOs in EU partner countries** to open a dialogue with their EU delegation about meaningful engagement.
→ **for EU delegation staff** to identify where small changes can make a real difference.

Before the consultation

- ☐ Share the timeline of your consultation process, with a clear stated purpose, to allow participants to plan and mobilise.
- ☐ Reach out to your country's CSO platform(s) for support, for example to identify CSOs.
- ☐ Consult civil society to identify and reflect on ways to overcome accessibility barriers.
- ☐ Consider budgeting for interpretation, cost of travel (trip, accommodation), and other accessibility measures.
- ☐ Consider organising consultations with different groups of CSOs and communicate transparently about these different opportunities to give civil society the full picture of the process.
- ☐ Create a database or mapping of civil society to go beyond the usual suspects.
- ☐ Include in the invitation: programme, background information, preparatory documents, and clear purposes and expected outcomes of the session.
- ☐ Send information with enough time for participants to prepare their attendance, inputs and questions.
- ☐ Share resources and hold information sessions about complex topics (namely on Global Gateway, Team Europe initiatives), especially ahead of consultations.
- ☐ Share information beyond funding and projects, including but not limited to the EU's new strategies for collaboration and support, regional and country priorities, an overview of current projects.

During the consultation

- ☐ Look at local and national actors or partners and the community as a source of knowledge and expertise.
- ☐ Consider “workshop-style approaches and spaces that genuinely foster collective creation” (Costa Rica), such as break out groups or discussions on (even more) targeted topics.
- ☐ Consider multiple formats for CSOs to share their inputs and combine a couple as part of a process: interviews, surveys, meetings in-person and/or online, written inputs.
- ☐ Share confidentiality and other safety measures with participants.
- ☐ Avoid EU jargon when possible.
- ☐ Where appropriate, invite Team Europe actors or organise multistakeholder exchanges.

After the consultation

- ☐ Keep the websites updated with comprehensive information.
- ☐ Create channels for structural and systematic communication (e.g. an alert system/ mailing list by area of intervention).
- ☐ Provide clear timelines for participants to follow the process after the consultation.
- ☐ Share a follow-up communication after the consultation. This could include: a collection of all ideas shared (e.g. minutes, summary of discussions), the key takeaways and priorities that emerged, an explanation of what will and will not be taken on board, and the next steps.
- ☐ Consider the most appropriate format to share feedback (face-to-face meetings, reports, summaries/briefs/one-pagers, email).
- ☐ Send notice once the final outputs have been published so participants can see the impact of their participation (e.g. through the creation of mailing lists with the consultation's participants).
- ☐ Share the outcomes of policy dialogues with governments of the partner countries with civil society, including how they reacted to their inputs.
- ☐ Ensure the engagement with civil society is a continuous dialogue with feedback loops to build long-term, meaningful partnerships.

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