Towards a more effective partnership with civil society
CONCORD EU Delegations Report 2017
COUNTRY BRIEFS

HONDURAS
1. CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE COUNTRY

Civil society activism and initiatives in Honduras are constrained by high levels of violence (drug trafficking, organised crime and street gangs), inequality and social exclusion, as well as by political divisions (following the 2009/2010 crisis). While human rights defenders (e.g. women’s rights) and activists (e.g. issues related to land, environment and extractive resources) are especially targeted by attacks and judicial harassment, the government has so far failed to prosecute most crimes or provide effective protections for those at risk. It is one of most dangerous countries in the world for media workers and freedom of expression is restricted in practice (with the penalisation of defamation as a criminal action and self-censorship). In a positive development, in 2015 Honduras passed a law that establishes a new national system for the protection of human rights defenders and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights opened an office in the country.

The Special Law for Non-Governmental Development Organisations (“NGO-D Law” from 2011, with regulations enacted in 2013) prevents the government from exercising too much discretion when registering organisations and the current administration made several management changes to the Unit for Registering and Monitoring Civil Associations (URSAC) in an effort to modernise it, but registration procedures are long, cumbersome and expensive. Namely, there are administrative rules and procedures that require CSOs to purchase operating permits even for humanitarian aid, the sale of any service, and the defence of rights. The operating procedures for CSOs are not clear in several aspects. The repeated attacks by the President on civil society organisations that disagree with his policies, namely by accusing some organisations to receive funding from criminal groups, represents an attempt to delegitimise the work of civil society and human rights organisations.

CSO networks also continue their efforts to push for more a comprehensive law to regulate the sector (as the existing one only applies to NGOs). Some NGOs (FOPRIDEH with other local and international NGOs) engaged in the current discussions of a new tax code, which had some articles restrictive to the actions of development actors, and successfully advocated for changes in those articles. An online platform for CSOs registration in order to facilitate the follow-up of legal and administrative procedures, implemented by FOPRIDEH with USAID support, was presented but it is not operational yet.

In general, the openness of public authorities to engage civil society in decision making processes is limited, but some improvements have been witnessed in the last few years with the establishment of frameworks for dialogue (Civil Society Participation Commission, Citizen Council to support the Public Ministry). Participation of civil society in public policies remains, however, mostly circumscribed to non-challenging sectors, such as the provision of basic services where CSOs are acknowledged for bringing in added value, and invitation of civil society to participate in legislative processes is generally limited to presentation/information sessions rather than consultation (e.g. reform of the Penal Code, in which CSOs were invited to validate the document, but many CSOs criticised it because it could lead to the criminalisation of social protest).

2. SUPPORTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CSOs IN HONDURAS

In Honduras, there is a recognition about the limitations that the EU faces in advocating for civil society issues directly in the dialogue with public authorities, but CSOs generally feel that the EU could take a more active stance, at political level, on defending civil society and human rights in the country, particularly regarding the legislative framework that affects CSOs and pressuring for the protection and investigation of human rights violations. Regarding the legislative framework, there has been no high-level involvement of the EU on issues such as the reform of CSO registration systems (although the implementation of a single registration system for CSOs is an indicator of the EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Honduras).

Nevertheless, the EU engagement with civil society has been reinforced in the last few years, mostly due to the commitment, will and openness to dialogue of EUD staff, despite the limited human and financial resources. The EU Multiannual Indicative Programme for Honduras 2014-2020 is clear about the role of civil society in the country and the EU objective to implement a comprehensive approach to promoting an environment that empowers civil society. Regarding human rights, an enhanced dialogue with civil society is taken place through the “Grupo Enlace” (since 2014), mechanism which has allowed for EU ambassadors to take notice about human rights defenders and civil

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1 According to the CIVICUS monitor, the status in Civic Space is classified as “repressed”. Honduras is classified as “partly free” on political rights and civil liberties by the Freedom of the Word Index (2016), and ranks 126th in the Transparency International index (out of 177 countries, in 2015). For a detailed analysis of civil society space in the country, see CIVICUS monitor (https://monitor.civicus.org/country/honduras/), ICNL Civic Freedom Monitor (www.icnl.org/research/monitor/honduras.html), and Human Rights Watch Report 2017 (www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/honduras).

2 The assassination of Berta Caceres, Nelson Garcia and Paola Barraza have undermined trust and mark the dialogue on enabling environment for civil society in Honduras.

3 Federación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo de Honduras.

4 MIP 2014-2020 defines 3 priorities: (1) food security; (2) Employment; and (3) Rule of Law (including increased democratic participation by civil society and particularly women).
3. DIALOGUE AND INSTRUMENTS FOR ENGAGING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Sectoral high-level dialogue between the EU and civil society is mostly focused on human rights, through the regular exchange mechanism “Grupo Enlace”, a platform in which EU Member States, Switzerland, the UN representation (including the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) and the EU Ambassador meet every two months to debate these issues with local CSOs. The mechanism is part of the EU local strategy for the protection of human rights defenders and the EU has been playing a pivotal role in driving this initiative in the last two years. INGOs play a role in supporting local organisations in the preparation phase and in coordinating proposals and issues to be discussed. Public authorities have recently participated (participation of the Secretary of Human Affairs and discussion of the national mechanism for the protection of human right defenders) in Grupo Enlace. Nevertheless, the feedback on results and follow-up of these meetings could be improved.

The Roadmap

The EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Honduras was approved by the EUD on 2014, after a consultation process, and reviewed in 2016. Among the most relevant aspects of this update is the engagement of Member States in its discussion and endorsement, the definition of a monitoring mechanism and the creation of a Reference Group to establish a structured dialogue.

The document states the need to develop a more strategic relationship with CSOs and several EU processes that are on-going and of interest for CSOs are included in the summary, such as the dialogue on human rights, the monitoring of the Association Agreement (addressing trade, cooperation and political dialogue), and current sectoral dialogues in line with the country priorities. The documents mentions the establishment of a tripartite space of dialogue for EU funded programmes/projects under the 2014-2020 programming, in particular on food security, employment and rule of law, and it would be interesting to monitor the developments regarding this indicator. It establishes clear actions for each of the priorities, although with no timeframe or task division (there is no clarity on when and how these actions are going to be implemented).

Despite the EUD commitment to this process and the technical improvements of the revision, there is a lack of visibility of the roadmap, as well as lack of knowledge on the follow-up of the roadmap implementation and on what is expected from civil society and from EU Member States. Some CSOs have also organised themselves to monitor the roadmap, and several meetings were held on this regard, with the general perception that it could be a more effective tool if the minimum resources were ensured. The necessary structure to implement the roadmap is not clear nor in place, namely in terms of dialogue mechanisms

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5 [http://padhhonduras.org/](http://padhhonduras.org/), The programme was finalised in December 2016.

6 Resolution available at [http://ow.ly/DCmp308T0d4](http://ow.ly/DCmp308T0d4)


8 There is a short summary of the roadmap publicly available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/hojarutahonduras_es_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/hojarutahonduras_es_0.pdf). It establishes 3 priorities, in line with the 2012 EC Communication (enabling environment: CSO participation in national policies and in EU programming cycles; and to improve local CSO capacities) and specific activities/results. The plan of action is to be approved soon.
and the necessary financial and human resources (the roadmap process adds to the already overstretched EUD staff; the CSO mapping was not completed due to lack of funds; there is no facilitator to the process).

**Funding opportunities**

As in most EU partner countries, the main EU funding opportunities for CSOs in Honduras are implemented through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) that finances civil society’s projects in this area, and the Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities (CSO-LA) thematic programme. The thematic priorities of these funding instruments generally correspond to civil society needs and are important to reinforce an enabling environment (human rights, vulnerable populations, indigenous peoples, women’s access to justice, etc.). Although civil society considers these funding instruments to be very relevant, concerns about the trends in these calls for proposals are common to most countries: limited funds and preference for big projects (4 to 5 projects in each call), heavy and time-demanding procedures and very complex and strict requirements versus the restricted possibility of getting a grant, difficulty for smaller organisations in accessing these funds, recent changes in technical requirements (e.g., new elements of the log frame and very different application procedures from other donors). The preference for consortiums and the promotion of sub-granting are positive steps to reach more organisations, provided that important elements are taken into account (such as the capacity building of smaller and local CSOs, and the quality of partnerships). However, there is the concern that sub-granting is the only entry point for small and community-based organisations in order to access EU funding. More systematic trainings on applications and capacity development of CSOs (beyond the inclusion of capacity building initiatives in funded projects by the calls for proposals), a more detailed and clear feedback on the rejection of proposals, and increased predictability on future calls for proposals would also be welcomed by CSOs.

There are also bilateral cooperation programmes that support civil society actions through calls for projects in those areas: “Eurojusticia” (contributing to combat impunity, corruption and violent crime and to ensure access of the population to an efficient, effective, transparent and reliable justice) has contract-
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CONCORD is the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development. Its 28 national associations, 20 international networks and 3 associate members represent over 2,600 NGOs which are supported by millions of citizens across Europe. CONCORD is the EU institutions’ main partner in dialogue on development policy. As a confederation, CONCORD work towards a world where people enjoy their right to live free of poverty and exploitation and their right to enjoy wellbeing and equality. More at: www.concordeurope.org