

Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations

Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027

1. SUMMARY

The EU is a longstanding global champion for civil society as development actors in their own right and supports their engagement to contribute to democratic processes and to achieve better development outcomes. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are vital to the attainment of human rights, the rule of law, liberal democracy, peace, conflict prevention, resilience and stability in our partner countries, and are key partners in **devising and implementing policies and programmes that meet people's needs, reduce inequalities**, and fulfil the central commitment of the **2030 Agenda to leave no one behind**. Regrettably, the ability for civil society to act is diminishing through a continuous deterioration of the environment in which they operate. This negative trend is currently intensified by the Covid-19 crisis, which has brought on a trail of restrictive measures.

The European Commission's continued and increased focus on support for civil society is demonstrated in the Mission letter for Commissioner Urpilainen¹ that emphasises the importance of a “dedicated focus on supporting civil society around the world,” stressing that the EU shall work to “ensure they have a far greater role in designing and implementing European policies, programmes and projects.” In line with this, support for civil society under the next Multi-annual Financial Framework should be **mainstreamed through all geographic and thematic programmes of the Commission**.

The Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is the only thematic programme with a clear **actor-based mandate** under the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). The overall aim of the Programme is to **strengthen CSOs as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right**. To this end, interventions under the programme shall primarily contribute to an *enabling and accessible environment for civil society; a more inclusive CSO participation in dialogue; and to strengthen CSO partner capacities*. The Programme will furthermore entail the DEAR (Development Education and Awareness Raising) programme, focused on European citizens' awareness of sustainable development, with actions in the EU, candidate and potential candidate countries.

The Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations will be funded under the NDICI-Global Europe² to a total of EUR 1 511.85 million³. In adherence with the principles of subsidiarity and geographisation, at least 75% of the programme funds will be managed by Delegations through country allocations, whereas the remaining funds shall be managed at global level for actions that cannot be effectively addressed at country level because of their global and trans regional nature.

The first overarching priority of the programme at both global and country level is *An inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; and an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society organisations*. The second overarching

¹ Mission letter, Commissioner Urpilainen; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-jutta-urpilainen_en.pdf

² REGULATION (EU) 2021/947 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 9 June 2021, establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009

³ Including EUR 200 million from the cushion

priority, relating to the specific component of the DEAR programme, is *A better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises)*. Through this approach the programme will contribute primarily to the Commission's priorities on **Governance, Peace and Security, and Human Development**; to supporting the vital role of civil society with regard to SDG 16 and 17; as well as to the implementation of the of the Joint Communication and EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024⁴. Through its focus on **strengthening civil society, the environment in which they operate, and their ability to act as development partners**, the programme will furthermore contribute to all of the Commission's core priorities. The programme entails several elements of added value; its actor-based nature; its comprehensiveness and worldwide coverage; and its ability to act independently from the consent of government and other public authorities and will be implemented in full complementarity to geographic and other thematic programmes.

2. Overall Context

2. 1. The international situation and the activities of the main partners for the thematic concerned

The Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is the only thematic programme with a clear **actor-based mandate** under the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). Its aim is to support an **inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries, an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society**, as well as a **better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises)**.

Civil society is highly heterogeneous and encompasses a wide range of actors and aims. The EU considers civil society organisations to embrace a wide range of actors with multiple roles and mandates which includes all non-State, not-for-profit independent and non-violent structures, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social or economic or related to health.⁵ Within the framework of development cooperation, civil society stands out thanks to its capacity to reach, empower, represent and defend local populations. It plays a vital role in voicing the concerns of local communities, especially people in **vulnerable and marginalised situations** in an inclusive way.

CSOs' participation in dialogue and policymaking is key in bringing expertise from the ground and **devising policies that meet people's needs**, and thus vital to fulfil the central commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. Civil society is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable

⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024: eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf (europa.eu)

⁵ They include, but are not limited to: Nongovernmental organisations, organisations representing indigenous peoples, women's and youth organisations, diaspora organisations, migrants' organisations, local traders' associations and citizens' groups, cooperatives, employers' associations and trade unions (social partners), organisations representing economic and social interests, organisations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organisations and organisations combating discrimination, local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration, consumer organisations, environmental, teaching, cultural, research and scientific organisations, universities, churches and religious associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, the not-for-profit media and any non-governmental associations and independent foundations, including independent political foundations.

Development Goals (SDGs) and is particularly relevant for the success of SDG 16 and 17, which call for peaceful and inclusive societies as well as a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. In addition, CSOs are **allies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in full**, not least as the agenda requires deep structural and behavioural changes in society that they can contribute to through awareness raising and advocacy.

CSOs furthermore play a role in boosting domestic accountability through free and accessible information, promoting human rights (including the rights of children and vulnerable groups), and by monitoring human rights violation, the respect for the rule of law, corruption and the implementation and impact of policies. Civil society, including trade unions, seek to ensure that investment and growth are directed to **reduce inequalities**, but also that businesses **respect human rights as well as the environment**. Civil society is a vital actor for conflict prevention, resilience and security in fragile contexts and are furthermore often the basis of resilience at community level, and vital partners in risk reduction as well as in response to crisis. Finally, yet importantly, CSOs play a key role in service delivery, in particular when authorities are unable or unwilling to reach some target groups, in particular the most marginalised or vulnerable ones and people with certain health conditions. This is highly relevant with regard to the management of Covid-19 and the post-Covid evolution where CSOs play, and will continue to play, a vital role.

Despite increased recognition of these vital roles of civil society, **the ability for civil society to act freely as actors in their own right is continuously diminishing, with very few positive examples of the opposite**⁶. This closing space for civil society is part of a general authoritarian pushback against democracy⁷. In recent years, over a hundred governments have introduced restrictive laws limiting the operations of civil society organisations. This has had a serious negative impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights, and it poses a significant obstacle to civil society organisations' abilities as actors of good governance and sustainable development. Regimes across the world now use an array of tactics ranging from legal, administrative, and financial regulations to defamation and violence.⁸ State and non-state actors use intimidation, harassment, or attacks to silence individuals and organisations. This negative development has recently intensified in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, which has brought a trail of restrictive measures.

2. 2. Overall external goals and priorities of the EU

The EU is a longstanding global champion for civil society, building on decades of EU development cooperation with civil society partners. In 2012 this was manifested by the adoption of its landmark Communication “The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations” (2012)⁹. This core policy document recognises CSOs as development actors in their own right and supports their engagement to build stronger democratic processes, social dialogue and accountability systems and to achieve better development outcomes. It thus departed from the

6 According to the CIVICUS Monitor the situation deteriorated in eleven countries between 2019 to 2020, and only two improved. 87 % of the world's population now live in countries rated as ‘closed’, ‘repressed’ or ‘obstructed - an increase of over 4% from 2020. See: <https://findings2020.monitor.civicus.org/rating-changes.html>

7 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2019”, 2019, p. 1.

8 Noticeable negative developments include increasingly strict approval and licensing procedures for CSOs; requiring funds to be channeled through government-controlled intermediaries; punitive taxes and administrative fees; and arduous and discriminatory administrative requirements. Youngs, R. and A. Echague, “Shrinking space for Civil Society: the EU response”, European Parliament, Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies, April 2017, p. 9.

9 The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM (2012) 492).

traditional view that the role of CSOs is mainly to implement development projects and changed the focus towards strengthening CSOs to improve citizens' involvement in societal decisions beyond and outside of elections, to further participatory democracy and good governance. The 2012 Communication also recognises the significant role of civil society in delivering social services, with a particular focus on disenfranchised and marginalised groups. The importance of civil society partnerships was further strengthened in the European Consensus on Development 2017¹⁰ and the 2017 Council Conclusions¹¹, underlining that civil society should be mainstreamed in all external instruments and programmes and in all areas of cooperation. The 2015 review of the European Neighbourhood Policy also reinforced the key role of civil society, which was subsequently integrated into joint Partnership Priorities with European Neighbourhood partner countries.

In line with the mandate described above, the EU has substantially supported CSOs under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) period. Overall, the EU has contracted ca EUR 7.5 billion¹² to Civil Society in development cooperation, corresponding to around 10% of total cooperation during the period 2014-19. The EU was, by virtue of the overall size of funding, the second largest DAC provider of ODA to civil society¹³ and the largest provider of support to local civil society in partner countries.

The commitments expressed in the above-mentioned Communication were reflected, amongst others, in the "Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Programme" (CSO-LA), a dedicated thematic programme under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) for the period 2014-2020, with two consecutive Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) for, 2014-2017 and 2018-2020, setting the strategic objectives for the period. The latter specifically incorporated the principles of the European Consensus on Development, particular regarding the role of CSOs as promoters of democracy, raising the level of engagement with citizens, and the EU's determination to implement the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development¹⁴.

Whilst the CSO-LA Programme has been the sole dedicated programme for CSOs, it is important to note that it was not the only, or main, source of EU funding for civil society. Around 3 billion or 47% of the overall support to civil society was financed with geographic funds while 27% came from the CSO-LA thematic programme and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).¹⁵

2.3. Problems and challenges

The Mission Letter for Commissioner Urpilainen¹⁶ emphasises the importance of a “dedicated focus on supporting Civil Society around the world,” stressing that “as the experts on the ground, they often lead the way on sustainable development” and stating that the EU shall work to “ensure they have a far greater role in designing and implementing European policies, programmes and projects.” In line with this, **support for, and cooperation with, civil society will be even more important under the next MFF, in all prioritised areas of the Commission.** This is especially true with regard to strengthening pluralistic

10 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24011/european-consensus-for-development-st09459en17.pdf>

11 EU engagement with Civil Society in external relations - Council conclusions (19 June 2017)

12 Total contracted by INTPA, NEAR and FPI with civil society during the period 2014-19 (INTPA dashboard, all MFF, scope 3, channel of delivery 20000, 21000, 22000, 23000)

13 EU institutions in 2019 were second only to the US according to the 2021 Aid for Civil Society OECD DAC report, however the EU institutions disbursements to Civil Society were 11% of total EU bilateral aid which is lower than the 15% average of OECD DAC donors.

14 The New European Consensus On Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future, 2017

15 The remaining 26% from other thematic programmes and trust funds

16 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-urpilainen-2019-2024_en.pdf

and inclusive democracies, as outlined in the prioritised area on **Governance, Peace and Security and Human Development**. Engagement with CSOs under all geographic and relevant thematic programmes in the Commission's prioritised thematic areas of the Green Deal, Digital and Data Technologies, Migration Partnerships, and the "Economy that works for the people", will furthermore be vital to ensure that initiatives are sustainable and serving the people (especially the most vulnerable and marginalised) to reduce inequalities; that new technologies are beneficial for everyone, not increasing a digital divide and poverty of segments of society; and that the required societal change towards a green economy, is understood and embraced by all. In the same vein, civil society is important to attain EU goals on human development, including education, health, gender equality and women's empowerment, in fragile and crises settings and for vulnerable and marginal populations.

This approach to CSO engagement requires civil society **participation** in dialogue on, and implementation and monitoring of activities within, core priorities of the European Commission, such as the Green Deal, Digitalisation, Migration, Jobs and Growth. This will in turn require actions to **strengthen the capacity of CSOs** working in these areas, on all levels. This will in turn require attention and increased support, especially with regard to local and grass-root organisations, as well as youth and women's organisations, in partner countries, which are today receiving limited support, have limited technical capacities in prioritised areas such as digitalization, and are hard to reach with traditional modalities for support.

The main challenge for civil society globally, as for EU cooperation with civil society however, is the closing space and the continuous **deterioration of an enabling environment** for civil society as described above. To date, CSOs have had limited capacities to counter the threat posed by a closing space. They also face limitations to their capacities ranging from limitations in technical management and leadership skills and fundraising, to results management and issues of internal governance. This is especially true for local and grass-root civil society entities in partner countries. As the environment in which civil society operates deteriorates, the ability of Civil Society Organisations to act freely as actors of good governance and development in their own right diminishes. This is today a reality in a large majority of our partner countries. This ability to act is a fundamental objective for EU efforts to support CSOs, since a lack thereof risks undermining not only priorities and goals in the area of human rights, peace, and democracy, but in all prioritized areas of EU cooperation where civil society is an important partner in dialogue, implementation and monitoring of interventions.

3. The Overall EU Strategy

3.1: Introduction: Overall EU strategy and priorities with regard to civil society

The EU aims to work with a wide spectrum of civil society actors, both in order to support their role as **independent actors of good governance and development**, vital to the attainment of human rights, the rule of law, democracy, peace and stability in our partner countries, and to efficiently include them as **key partners** in designing, implementing, and monitoring European policies, programmes and projects in all prioritized areas of EU development cooperation.

The majority of the support to CSOs is foreseen to continue to be provided under the geographic programmes, through targeted support to strengthen CSOs and by **mainstreaming civil society** in country

areas of cooperation to attain set development goals, in particular pertaining to the Commissions geopolitical priorities.

The specific goal of the Civil Society Organisations Thematic Programme is to strengthen CSOs as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right. This is fully in line with the overarching goals of the NDICI-Global Europe to support inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society; and (for the DEAR component) a better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises). The programme will thus contribute primarily to the Commission priorities on Governance, Peace and Security, and Human Development, and to supporting the vital role of civil society with regard to SDG 16 and 17¹⁷.

All initiatives and actions under the **global part** of the programme, amounting to approximately 25% of the programme overall funding, will contribute to this specific objective and so will **actions under the programme at country level**¹⁸. The dominant sector under which initiatives will be funded will be Government & Civil Society¹⁹.

Through this approach the programme will contribute to the attainment of the goals of the Joint Communication and EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024, with particular regard to the ambition to “Promote a safe and an enabling environment for civil society as actors in their own right, including long-term strategic support to capacity building and meaningful participation of civil society at country, regional and global level” as well as to the ambition to “Promote structured and regular dialogues between state actors, civil society (including social partners) and the international community” to “Foster the role of civil society in oversight and accountability in both the public and the private sector, promoting the use of online technologies” and to “Support and strengthen long-term partnerships with civil society actors and human rights/social movements, also by making full use of the opportunities to fund grassroots organisations”.²⁰

3.2: Achievements and lessons learned: The CSO-LA Programme 2014-2020

The CSO Thematic Programme under NDICI-Global Europe builds on the achievements and lessons learned of the CSO-LA (Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities) programme 2014-2020. The CSO component of the programme amounted to EUR 1.44 billion dedicated to supporting CSOs at global (25%) and country level (75%). At global level, the programme supported international and regional networks through 25 **Framework Partnership Agreements** (FPAs) with CSO networks. FPAs are based on the establishment of common objectives between the EU and its CSO partners and are accompanied by a grant²¹. Though global and regional, these FPAs have served to strengthen a broad

17 SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”

18 In line with programming guideline instruction: “Following the geographisation principle, thematic programmes will focus on actions having a global or trans-regional nature or actions undertaken without the consent of partner countries’ governments.” Geographic programmes will be the main source of funding for civil society complemented by actions, relevant to this instruction and in line with the overall aim of the programme, under the thematic programme.

19 OECD-DAC purpose code

20 Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024: eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf (europa.eu)

21 A total of approximately 108 million over 2014-2020 for CSO Networks

variety of CSOs globally and in partner countries, as the framework partners are umbrella organisations that provide various capacity-strengthening support to their network members as well as through the use of sub-granting. The global component also funded the structural dialogue between the EU and CSOs networks and associations of local authorities through the **Policy Forum on Development (PFD)**, as well as initiatives under crosscutting priorities such as CSO development effectiveness, youth empowerment and countering inequalities. At country level, the Delegations supported the capacity of local CSOs²² and their participation in policymaking. Climate change, gender, and youth, but also crisis and resilience, and root causes of migration were policy priorities for the period 2018-20. The work at country level was framed by 110 **CSO Country Roadmaps**; EU, and Member States strategies for engagement with civil society, reflecting the three priorities of the 2012 Communication: enabling environment for civil society, participation, and capacity development. The following outcomes of recent evaluations will be adequately considered in the programme, throughout planning, implementation, and monitoring:

- The **Mid-term review of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)**²³ highlighted the relevance for and the coherence of the CSO-LA programme with EU policy objectives and its complementarity with geographic interventions. It specifically highlighted its independence of action, as implementation does not require authorization of national authorities in partner countries, allowing the EU to address sensitive issues. It also stressed the progress made in increasing the involvement of CSOs, particularly in programming and implementation. Nevertheless, the assessment indicated that CSOs still used EU funds more in their roles as traditional implementers of aid rather than as actors of good governance, notably due to a growing restrictive environment and an increasing number of countries in conflict.
- Findings from the recent **evaluation of the CSO-LA Programme**²⁴ conclude that the programme was highly relevant with regard to its global nature and independence of action and that it contributed to its overarching goals, but also argues that the programme was too ambitious and found deficiencies in ensuring complementarity with geographical and thematic programmes. Whilst there is evidence that the programme contributed to capacity building of CSO partners in terms of building skills in program, project, and financial management, it was weaker on supporting CSO's internal governance, analysis, and advocacy skills, and in sector-specific capacity building. It also argues that, despite the mandate of the programme, to work with a wide spectrum of CSOs, it still primarily cooperates with a more limited spectrum of international, traditional CSOs. Support to local (grass-root) Civil Society Organisations remains limited,²⁵ and funds are not sufficiently reaching youth and women's organisations that are priorities for the Commission.
- Findings from the **Mid-term evaluation of the 25 FPAs concluded through the CSO-LA programme**²⁶ shows that the FPA approach is an adequate tool to deepen the strategic partnerships with CSO networks. The evaluation found that the FPAs have created conditions for improvement in the CSO organisations involved with regard to network capacity, dialogue and

22 According to our manual calculations 33% of INTPA reported contracts (2014-19) are with local CSOs which include local offices of international organisations.

23 External evaluation of the Development Co-operation Instrument, Final report, Volume I main report, June 2017

24 Evaluation of the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic programme (2014-2019), Final Report draft, March 2020.

25 OECD Peer Review 2018, Ch. 5 Fig 5.1. Internal analysis shows that 33% of INTPA funds in support for Civil Society were contracted to local Civil Society organisation during the period 2014-18, the DG NEAR evaluation finds that the share of local CSOs is above 50% for the period 2007-2018.

26 Mid-term Evaluation of the Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) and their corresponding specific grant agreement. Final Report, January 2021

performance in policy advocacy. Despite these positive results more could have been achieved if more attention had been paid to policy advocacy issues faced by FPAs' members at country level and to linking FPAs actions with country roadmaps at large. Finally cooperation between networks working in the same areas could have been further enhanced.

- **Consultations with civil society partners**²⁷ have underlined that promoting an enabling environment for civil society requires quick and flexible funding in response to regressions and opportunities of civic space. They have also underlined the need to have a proactive multi-stakeholder approach, and to raise awareness on CSOs' key role in achieving the SDGs. The need for regular dialogue with a wide range of civil society actors, including those representing the most marginalised populations, who should be able to raise their voices within national and international fora, has also been highlighted. Partners have furthermore argued that while the civil society programme should focus its support to CSOs for advocacy and oversight, it should not exclude service delivery but identify synergies between these approaches.

3.3: Guiding principles for the CSO Thematic Programme 2021-2027

In line with lessons learned and CSO consultations as presented above; the 2012 Communication; the 2017 Council Conclusions on EU engagement with civil society in external relations; and with the geopolitical priorities of the Commission, the CSO Thematic Programme strategy will take the following into consideration:

3.3.1 A focus on limited, transformative priorities

Activities funded under the programme will be exclusively limited to those directly corresponding to areas of intervention as established in the NDICI-Global Europe Annex III on the CSO Thematic Programme, which at large mirrors the three areas of intervention in the 2012 Communication: **a dedicated focus on contributing to an enabling environment for civil society; increased efforts for a more inclusive CSO participation in the dialogue on development policy and domestic policies in partner countries; a comprehensive approach to capacity building to strengthen CSO partner capacities.** These overarching priorities are foreseen to contribute to long-term, positive and transformative effects with regard to civil society's ability to operate as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right. The priorities valid for the global, regional as well as country level, translated into a result framework presented in the next section, to be further developed in the subsequent multi-annual action programmes at all levels.

Capacity building for basic social service delivery can be provided under the CSO Thematic Programme under certain circumstances (especially in fragile countries, in situations of crisis, and/or in especially restricted environment for CSOs) or for specific objectives (where such support can be said to be catalytic and/or innovative etc.). However, in accordance with the programme priorities and following conclusions of the CSO-LA evaluation, **support for service delivery under the thematic programme should notably be the exception rather than the norm, and should always include efforts to strengthen organisational capacities and/or links to advocacy efforts, in order to contribute to long-term positive and transformative effects as per above** It is expected that such support, when deemed

²⁷ In 2020 12 meetings and consultations took place under the Policy forum for Development of which 6 had a focus on the programming process at large and 1 specifically on the priorities of the CSO Thematic Programme

relevant, will contribute to the EU goal on human development and social inclusion, non-discrimination, including gender equality and women's empowerment as well as LGBTIQ equality, with a particular focus on reaching marginalised and vulnerable communities in difficult situations.

3.3.2 A broadened base of civil society partners

The Programme will in accordance with its mandate have the opportunity to engage with the **full spectrum of civil society actors**. This may include (but is not limited to) youth organisations, women's organisations, trade unions, employers' organisations, cooperatives, business and consumer organisations, rural organisations, faith-based organisations, environmental organisations, LGBTIQ, minority-, Indigenous peoples, organisations of people living with disability, community-based organisations, cultural organisations and foundations. In accordance with priorities and in line with findings of evaluations as above, specific priority and effort should however - especially at country level- be given to reaching and supporting **youth, women, and grass-root Civil Society Organisations**. Increased support for women's organisations will contribute to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in line with the priorities and targets of the third EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III). Engaging with youth in our partner countries through dialogue with and support for civil society organisations that represent them and their interest will be vital to ensure inclusive, innovative and sustainable development. A focus will accordingly be given at global as well as on country level to extend, and improve the quality of, our partnership with youth—and women organisations and networks. Work with small-scale, CSO funding will be promoted to ease access of funding for, and build the capacity of, grass-root CSOs, youth organisations and social movements. The Financial Framework Partnership Agreements and other partnerships with relevant platforms and networks at global level will serve to contribute to this goal through forwarding of funds to, and capacity building of, network members in partner countries.

3.3.3 Delivering on key principles

The CSO Thematic Programme will reflect the following key principles:

- The EU's determination to implement the **2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development**. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11, 16, and 17 have the most direct link with its scope, and, as CSOs are active across all the SDGs, contributes to the 2030 Agenda in partner countries as a whole.
- The **development effectiveness principles** through a focus on partnership and ownership, including the right to initiative by civil society partners, results, transparency, and mutual accountability.
- **Working better together in a Team Europe approach** has the potential to strengthen the efficiency, coherence, transparency, predictability, impact and visibility of the external assistance of the EU and its Member States by bringing together their resources and capacities.
- The **policy first principle** and is guided by core EU strategic policy objectives with regard to civil society, anchored in strong partnerships with civil society and reflecting shared interests and priorities.
- The **EU gender equality policy**, integrating the objectives of the third EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III), with a specific focus on the goal outlined in the NDICI-GLOBAL EUROPE on enhancing funding to women's organisations and other relevant organisations working on gender

equality²⁸ as well as to strengthen strategic dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment with CSOs including women organisations.

- The EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025's pillar on LGBTIQ equality around the world²⁹
- **Promoting social dialogue** in order to enhance the democratic decision-making
- The implementation of the **Rights-Based Approach (RBA)** to development, encompassing all Human Rights as well as EU's commitment to promote and protect human rights and democracy as enshrined in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024)
- The DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance³⁰

3.4: Complementarity to Geographic Programmes and Instruments³¹

The programme will entail several elements of added and unique value: **its actor-based nature; its comprehensiveness and worldwide coverage; and its ability to act independently from the consent of government and other public authorities**. This contributes to its complementarity to other programmes and instruments. Civil society will continue to be supported and mainstreamed throughout geographic programmes and instruments, and other thematic programmes under the new MFF. Civil society remains a crosscutting priority for EU development comparable to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and to increasing human capital (health, education, and skills), and should be considered in, and contribute to, all of the Commission's overarching priorities. To enable such mainstreaming of civil society, in policy dialogue, implementation and monitoring of EU policies and initiatives under all priority areas, the CSO Thematic Programme's support for an enabling environment for civil society will be crucial to allow for their ability to fully partake. The CSO Thematic Programme will, as noted above, furthermore focus on supporting actions to strengthen the capacity of a broad range of CSO actors, including those working specifically in the priority areas of the EU, and on actively supporting their inclusion in relevant policy dialogue at all levels. Support to CSO at country level will also enhance their capacity to participate in Joint Programming and Team Europe Initiatives. This will allow for an informed and constructive CSOs participation in policy dialogue with the EU and partner-country actors. Strengthened CSO capacity will also serve to raise awareness among citizens and thereby contribute to the successful preparation and implementation of national and EU specific policies. Thus, the set-up and focus of the programme will provide an important complement to, and support for, broader geographical counterparts by accompanying them with a strong CSO dimension. The CSO Thematic Programme's focus on an enabling environment for civil society will also offer complementarity, as the prerequisite for civil society inclusion is its ability to act. Dedicated public diplomacy support measures could facilitate the connection between European and partner country civil society actors in order to grow

28 The objectives and Performance Indicators of GAP III can be found in the Staff Working Document Objectives and Performance Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III.

29 Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2020) 698 final

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

31 Including the Instrument for Pre-Accession III

mutual understanding and share good practices to tackle common challenges. These opportunities for public diplomacy may focus, inter alia, on different areas³² as well as on key EU values and principles³³.

Any EU support for civil society shall **respect the independence and right to initiative of civil society**. To follow up on the quality, as well as quantity, of its overall support to civil society throughout all areas, a strengthened monitoring mechanism for overall support to civil society will therefore be included under the thematic programme.

4. Priorities selected for financing by the EU

The overall aim of the CSO Thematic Programme 2021-2027 is **to strengthen CSOs as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right**. To this end, interventions under the programme shall primarily contribute to a dedicated focus on contributing to an enabling environment for civil society; increased efforts for a more inclusive CSO participation in dialogue; a comprehensive approach to capacity building to strengthen CSO partner capacities. The programme will be funded under the NDICI-GLOBAL EUROPE to a total of EUR 1 511.85 million. At least 75% of the programme funds will continue to be managed by Delegations in partner countries, whereas the remaining funds shall be managed at global level. Approximately 10% of programme funds shall be dedicated to activities under the DEAR programme. This civil society MIP will cover the whole period 2021-27 of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) being understood that, in accordance with the article 16.4 of the NDICI-GE Regulation, a **mid-term review** may lead to a revision of the strategy for the period 2025-2027 as well as on an ad hoc basis as necessary for effective implementation.

Based on the analysis above, and following consultations, the following priorities and sub-objectives are selected for financing for the period in full:

PRIORITY 1: An inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; and an inclusive and open dialogue with and between Civil Society Organisations.

Specific Objective 1.1: Support Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as actors of good governance and development: Strengthen global partnerships

This sub-objective will be implemented at the global level, managed at HQ and will, as relevant, benefit all INTPA, and NEAR countries.

Expected result 1.1: The capacity and effectiveness of civil society advocacy, and their participation in or contribution to policymaking is strengthened.

- Performance Indicator 1.1.1: Number of CSOs, including FPAs and their members, and social partners providing inputs to (regional and) international and multilateral decision-making arenas with EU support.
- Performance Indicator 1.1.2: Share of the top 10 recommendations issued by the Global and Regional Policy Forum on Development that INTPA/NEAR have a) provided feedback on and b) taken into account³⁴.

³² Such as climate democracy, economic diplomacy, energy diplomacy, cultural diplomacy etc.

³³ Including multilateralism, democracy, human rights and gender equality

³⁴ EURF, Methodology under development.

Activities under sub-objective 1.1 will include:

i. **Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA):** The FPAs contribute greatly to the capacity building and advocacy activities of a broad base of CSO networks and their members, and this model is a vital instrument for EU support to, and partnership with, civil society. The FPA model reinforces and contributes to **shared overarching objectives and specific priorities of civil society and the EU** whilst, as they are based on the strategic plan of the organisation, ensuring respect for civil society independence and right to initiative. The networks are crucial in building alliances, ensuring CSOs' role in global and multilateral processes, feeding up perspectives from the ground and allowing for trickle-down of policy commitments. Through global awareness-raising and advocacy, they are vital partners in achieving the SDGs and addressing inequalities. A wide range of CSO networks will be selected under the programme for future partnership agreements, with particular focus given to the inclusion of women's and youth networks. FPAs will be mostly global networks, active in the priority areas of the Commission, with the possible inclusion of a limited number of regional networks based on specific priorities or on a situation in a particular region in complementarity to thematic or geographic programmes. Care will be taken to ensure that the global-partner country linkages of the FPA networks are better communicated to and utilised by EU Delegations and particular attention will be paid to FPAs capacity to serve their members.

ii. **Policy Forum for Development (PFD) 2.0:** The EU's main global dialogue Forum with CSOs (and LAs) on development will be strengthened and better utilised to systematically consult a broad and representative range of civil society on policies and programmes in line with the Mission letter of Commissioner Urpilainen.³⁵ More concretely, it is proposed that the working modalities of the PFD will be expanded, to complement the yearly global and regional meetings with a virtual platform for continuous, moderated discussions and online-consultations, both on a global and regional level. Thematic working groups may be constituted to cover the European Commission priorities and other relevant topics. In addition, possible actor-based working groups are envisioned to provide input into EU policy formulation processes. Consultations will include clear guidance and information on expectations and outcomes, and feedback will be given to ensure relevance for all parties. Consultations within this Forum will be done in collaboration with the relevant thematic and geographic units and with relevant EC services and the involvement of other EU institutions as well as EU Member States will also be strengthened.

iii. A continued **partnership with foundations** is foreseen. Cooperation with foundations will be mainstreamed in the general civil society portfolio, globally and in partner countries. In addition to this, dedicated support for foundations is envisioned to ensure continued cooperation to contribute towards the goals of the CSO Thematic Programme. This includes the possibility of a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA), targeting the development of an enabling environment for philanthropy in partner countries.

iv. The programme will also support a limited number of **specific platforms and/or networks of direct relevance to the priorities of the programme**. Examples include support aiming at strengthening civil society's ability to engage with budget processes and domestic resource mobilisation, particularly in countries where the EU provides budget support, fostering ambitious standards of transparency and accountability.

³⁵ See mission letter, Commissioner Urpilainen; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-jutta-urpilainen_en.pdf

Specific Objective 1.2: Contribute to an improved enabling environment for civil society

In addition to a continued mainstreaming of an enabling environment throughout all initiatives at all levels, a new global initiative, the “Monitoring and Engagement System” for an enabling environment will be developed and funded under the **global envelope**. This will encompass **monitoring** of all aspects pertaining to civic space and an enabling environment for civil society; **early warnings** in times of imminent change; global **flexible short-term support** to enable civil society actors to quickly engage in situations of deterioration and/or positive developments pertaining to this environment; and **long-term support** for CSO capacity. It will entail engagement in areas of relevance to an enabling environment such as advocacy and promotion of a positive narrative: access to funding; networking and strategic alliances; CSO transparency and accountability; digital capacities; access to legal advice and support.

The actions under the Monitoring and Engagement System will be implemented in complementarity with the thematic programme on Human Rights and Democracy, specifically with regard to global initiatives that focus in particular on most sensitive environments and situations where restrictions on fundamental freedoms and human rights are most pronounced and on actors active on human rights and democracy. The parallel but complementary implementation of these programmes will ensure that serious problems, vulnerable CSOs, or opportunities do not fall through gaps in EU support, while avoiding duplication. By generating and disseminating timely and meaningful information and analysis, including early warnings, actions under the system may in addition inform EU wide actions for democratic governance, civic space and an enabling and accessible environment for civil society.

Expected result 1.2: Civil society partner’s ability to detect and respond to situations of a deteriorating or improving enabling environment, and address and contribute to structural prerequisites for such an environment, is improved

- Performance Indicator 1.2.1: Number of preventive and supportive actions triggered by the early warning mechanism
- Performance Indicator 1.2.2: Number of CSOs whose capacity to engage in strengthening the enabling environment in which they operate is increased

Specific-Objective 1.3: Support CSOs as actors of good governance and development in partner countries

At country level, the CSO Roadmaps of EU and Member States serve as country strategies to engage meaningfully and continuously with civil society in a coordinated fashion. The Roadmaps are a strategic tool to ensure EU internal complementarity between the CSO thematic programme, other thematic, bilateral and regional programmes, as well as complementarity between EU and EUMS initiatives supporting civil society and thus serve to ensure mainstreaming of civil society in all priority areas and sectors. The Roadmaps can also serve as civil society platforms to engage with Delegations and inform their analysis and contribute to programming/joint programming and implementation. Future country actions will be **framed by and deliver on the priorities identified** by these EU roadmaps, which are most commonly: enabling environment; participation of CSOs and capacity development. Based on good practices, and in line with Commission priorities, the Roadmaps will further **a more systematic strategic dialogue** with civil society.

Expected result sub-objective 1.3: Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) ability to engage as actors of good governance and development at country level is improved.

- Performance Indicator 1.3.1: Number of government policies developed or revised with CSO participation through EU support³⁶
- Performance Indicator 1.3.2: Number of local and grassroots civil society organisations benefitting from (or reached by) EU support³⁷
- Performance Indicator 1.3.3: Increase in youth and women's organisations benefitting from EU support

Initiatives under the Thematic Programme at country level are funded by country allocations and programmed, implemented and monitored at country level by respective EU delegation.

Activities funded under the programme will at large:

- i. Target a broad range of local civil society actors (including and prioritising, but not limited to, women,-and youth organisations, grass-root, community-based and rural organisations).
- ii. Contribute to creating an enabling environment for civil society and the capacity of civil society actors to uphold and respond to changes in such environments.
- iii. Ensure that capacity of civil society is built across all its dimensions (including organisation, programme management, advocacy, governance and accountability, communication, access to funding). Particular attention should be paid to CSOs capacities to benefit from the digital transformation.
- iv. Strengthen the capacity of CSOs working specifically in EU priority areas and sectors to allow them to participate in an informed way in dialogue with the EU and national and local actors; contribute to the implementation of sustainable development provisions in their country, in the framework of agreements with the EU; represent and voice the concerns of people in vulnerable and marginalized situations contributing to combating inequalities; implement and monitor initiatives funded under the country programme; and raise awareness among citizens and thereby contributing to the successful implementation of our policies.
- v. Fund service delivery through CSOs under certain circumstances as outlined above (fragile countries, in situations of crisis, in restricted environment for CSO etc.) and specific objectives (catalytic, innovative).

PRIORITY 2 A better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises) (DEAR programme)

Specific Objective 2.1: EU citizens are supportive of sustainable development and international cooperation and increasingly aware of global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises).

³⁶ EURF, Methodology under development.

³⁷ EURF, Methodology under development.

This sub-objective will be implemented at the global level and managed at INTPA HQ. The programme will support activities implemented by CSOs aiming at strengthening knowledge and skills of EU citizens to promote sustainable development and to address global challenges at local and global level.

Expected result 2.1: Strengthened knowledge and skills of EU citizens to promote sustainable development and to address global challenges at local and global level;

- Performance Indicator 2.1.1: Number of European citizens supporting cooperation for sustainable development, disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer);
- Performance Indicator 2.1.2: Number of citizens that are aware of and understand their role in addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises), disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer – specific question to be included);

Specific Objective 2.2: EU citizens, in particular youth, are empowered and actively engaged in promoting sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises).

This sub-objective will be implemented at the global level and managed at INTPA HQ. The programme will support:

- activities implemented by the CSOs aiming at increasing opportunities for EU citizens, in particular youth, to actively engage in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges at local and global level;
- activities aiming at reinforced exchange of good practices and enhanced coordination and networks amongst key stakeholders (civil society organisations, including youth organisations and networks, local authorities, EU Member States, private sector, academia, and media);
- activities aiming at strengthening capacities and competencies of CSOs in the area of global education, advocacy and awareness raising on sustainable development and global challenges.

Expected result 2.2: Increased opportunities for EU citizens, in particular youth, to actively engage in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises) at local and global level;

- Performance Indicator 2.2.1: Number of citizens that are actively engaged in addressing global challenges by adapting their behaviour, disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer-specific question to be included);
- Performance Indicator 2.2.2: Number of citizens actively engaged in initiatives launched under the Programme, disaggregated by age and gender (data to be reported by projects)

Specific Objective 2.3: Global issues and global citizenship education are better integrated into formal and non-formal education in EU Member States

This sub-objective will be implemented at the global level and managed at INTPA HQ. The programme will support activities aiming at integrating global issues and global citizenship education into formal and non-formal education in EU Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems.

Expected result 2.3.a: Activities aiming at integrating global issues and global citizenship education organised in formal and non-formal education facilities.

Expected result 2.3.b: Reinforced exchange of good practices and enhanced coordination and networks amongst key stakeholders (civil society organisations, including youth organisations and networks, local authorities, EU Member States, private sector, academia and media);

- Performance Indicator 2.3.a.1: Number of schools and non-formal education facilities that organised activities (data to be reported by projects);
- Performance Indicator 2.3.b.1: Local, regional, national, European or corporate policies (of national authorities, CSOs, LAs, businesses etc.) influenced / reviewed (quantitative and qualitative data provided by projects).

SUPPORT MEASURES:

Support measures will be required to reinforce efficiency, performance and impact of the thematic programme implementation. These measures will allow for preparation, follow-up, monitoring, audit and evaluation activities, as well as other relevant activities directly linked to the achievement of the thematic programme's specific objectives, such as studies, meetings and consultations, exchanges of best practices, networking, training, information sessions, and communication and publication activities, including in support of public diplomacy activities.

4. 2. Overarching considerations

The Programme will be implemented using an appropriate mix of funding modalities to best respond to the widest possible range of actors, needs, and country contexts in a flexible, transparent, cost-effective, and result-focused manner. It will make a contribution to the NDICI-GLOBAL EUROPE spending targets that, because of the nature of the programme, cannot be quantified upfront.

The programme will work at country, EU, and global levels, nurturing the potential of CSOs in a variety of development contexts. It will primarily support activities promoting the role of CSOs as independent actors of good governance and development in their own right, also allowing for actions where they are providers of development assistance in EU prioritized areas with particular regard to service delivery in exceptional cases as presented above. The programme mixes long-term strategic actions nursing structural effects with short-term actions in times of crisis and has a strong focus on concrete actions on the ground as close as possible to citizens.

The objective remains to support civil society globally. Therefore, EU support to CSOs will continue to ensure the largest geographic coverage. The CSO thematic programme support to CSOs as actors of good governance and oversight of their own national processes, reforms, and resources is relevant in most partner countries, in complementarity with Thematic Programmes and country strategies such as MIPs, including where budget support is the main aid modality. Lastly, efforts for monitoring and evaluation of the Thematic Programme will be strengthened to ensure accountability and allow for communication of results. This will include the dissemination of successful innovative approaches and sharing of good practices with EU Member States, to achieve the full potential of the thematic programme.

5: FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

	Indicative amount in million EUR	<i>Of which cushion</i>	Indicative percentage share of total budget
<p><i>PRIORITY 1</i></p> <p><i>An inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; and an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society.</i></p>	1 330.43	176	88%
<p><i>PRIORITY 2</i></p> <p><i>A better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises).</i> <i>[DEAR Programme]</i></p>	151.18	20	10 %
Support measures	30.24	4	2 %
Total allocated for 2021-27	1 511.85	200	100%

Annex 1: Template for intervention framework CSO Thematic Programme

Priority area 1: An inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; and an inclusive and open dialogue with and between Civil Society Organisations.

Specific objective 1.1: Support Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as actors of good governance and development: Strengthen global partnerships.

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
Expected Result 1.1) The capacity and effectiveness of civil society advocacy, and their participation in or contribution to policymaking, is strengthened	<p>Performance Indicator 1.1.1) Number of CSOs, including FPAs and their members, providing inputs to regional and international and multilateral decision-making arenas with EU support.</p> <p>Performance Indicator 1.1.2) Share of the top 10 recommendations issued by the Global and Regional Policy Forum on Development that INTPA/NEAR have a) provided feedback on and b) taken into account</p>	<i>TBD</i>

Specific objective 1.2: Contribute to an improved enabling environment for civil society

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
Expected Result 1.2) Civil society partner's ability to detect and respond to situations of a deteriorating or improving enabling environment, and address and contribute to structural prerequisites for such an environment, is improved	<p>Performance Indicator 1.2.1) Number of preventive and supportive actions triggered by the early warning mechanism</p> <p>Performance Indicator 1.2.2) Number of CSOs whose capacity to engage in strengthening the enabling environment in which they operate is increased</p>	<i>TBD</i>

Specific Objective 1.3: *Support CSOs as actors of good governance and development in partner countries*

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
Expected Result 1.3) Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) ability to engage as actors of good governance and development at country level is improved	<p>Performance Indicator 1.3.1) Number of government policies developed or revised with CSO participation through EU support</p> <p>Performance Indicator 1.3.2) Number of local and grassroots civil society organisations benefitting from (or reached by) EU support</p> <p>Performance Indicator 1.3.3) Increase in youth, and women's organisations benefitting from EU support</p>	<i>TBD</i>

Priority area 2: *A better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises).*

Specific objective 2.1: *EU citizens are supportive of sustainable development and international cooperation and increasingly aware of global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises).*

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
Expected Result 2.1) Strengthened knowledge and skills of EU citizens to promote sustainable development and to address global challenges at local and global level	<p>Performance Indicator 2.1.1) Number of European citizens supporting cooperation for sustainable development, disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer);</p> <p>Performance Indicator 2.1.2) Number of citizens that are aware of and understand their role in addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises), disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer – specific question to be included);</p>	<i>TBD</i>

Specific Objective 2.2: *EU citizens, in particular youth, are empowered and actively engaged in promoting sustainable development, including addressing global challenges (notably global inequalities and ecological crises) at local and global level*

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
Expected result 2.2) Increased opportunities for EU citizens, in particular youth, to actively engage in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges at local and global level;	<p>Performance Indicator 2.2.1)</p> <p>Number of citizens that are actively engaged in addressing global challenges by adapting their behaviour, disaggregated by gender and age (Eurobarometer- specific question to be included)</p> <p>Performance Indicator 2.2.2)</p> <p>Number of citizens actively engaged in initiatives launched under the Programme, disaggregated by age and gender (data to be reported by projects)</p>	<i>TBD</i>

Specific Objective 2.3: *Global issues and global citizenship education are better integrated into formal and non-formal education in EU Member States*

Expected Results	Indicators	Baseline & targets
<p>Expected result 2.3.a) Activities aiming at integrating global issues and global citizenship education organised in formal and non-formal education facilities.</p> <p>Expected result 2.3.b) Reinforced exchange of good practices and enhanced coordination and networks amongst key stakeholders (civil society organisations, including youth organisations and networks, local authorities, EU Member States, private sector, academia and media);</p>	<p>Performance Indicator 2.3.a.1)</p> <p>Number of schools and non-formal education facilities that organised activities (data to be reported by projects);</p> <p>Performance Indicator 2.3.b.1) Local, regional, national, European or corporate policies (of national authorities, CSOs, LAs, businesses etc.) influenced / reviewed (quantitative and qualitative data provided by projects).</p>	<i>TBD</i>