



Guidelines on Civil Society Organisations' participation in Council of Europe's co-operation activities

Definition and Purpose

These guidelines aim at ensuring civil society organisations' participation in the planning, organisation and implementation of co-operation activities.

As stated in the Council of Europe (CoE)'s Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process¹, the term "civil participation" refers to NGOs and "organised civil society including voluntary groups, non-profit organisations, associations, foundations, charities, as well as geographic or interest-based community and advocacy groups" actively contributing to the development and the realisation of democracy and human rights. Informal civil society organisations will be included at the discretion of the CoE Field Offices and Secretariat staff.

The CoE is aware of the importance of civil society, which constitutes an important element of the democratic process and therefore encourages its involvement in the development and implementation of co-operation programmes, projects and activities.

Civil Society participation in different project/programme stages

Planning

- Taking part, as necessary, in an introduction/training on civil society organisations (CSO) and in particular on what CSO participation may entail in the planning, organisation and implementation of co-operation activities.
- Promoting civil society participation as an integral element of CoE's co-operation policies at all stages of the project/programme, and in particular at early stages, when the proposal is drafted or the activity is planned.
- Carrying out consultations with national or regional civil society organisations, in order to better identify needs and priority fields of co-operation.
- Taking into account information and data provided by CSO in the planning of programmes, projects and activities.
- Encouraging the provision of timely and comprehensive information on current planning of the project/programme to relevant CSO.
- Enabling the participation of CSO through budgetary provision.

¹ Following a recommendation of the CoE's Forum for the Future of Democracy of June 2007, the CoE's Conference of INGOs prepared a Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, adopted on 1st October 2009 and adopted a Promotion and Implementation Strategy for the Code. An expert group was created to follow developments and raise awareness to the Code.



Organisation/Implementation/Communication

- Choosing partners that are committed to include civil society in the implementation and organisation of projects.
- Making it clear to stakeholders (national and international partners, experts, etc.) that civil society organisations should be granted access to information during the implementation phase of the project/programme.
- Encouraging stakeholders to provide clear, open and accessible procedures for consultation of CSO, in particular ensuring the participation of civil society experts, speakers and participants and making sure that spaces and processes are in place as appropriate (such as, depending on the subject matter, asking NGOs for comments, views and feed-back, public hearings, regular meetings, participatory forums, co-decision-making bodies etc.).
- Encouraging stakeholders to take on board commentaries and recommendations put forward by CSO regarding the implementation of an activity.
- Including the following sentence when sending letters/reporting/communicating on an activity: *The Council of Europe is committed to achieving greater participation of civil society in the development and implementation of co-operation programmes, projects and activities.* [for example: *Please make sure you select civil society representatives to participate in this activity/Please make sure civil society is granted information/consulted in the process... .*] Adapt as necessary.
- Whenever possible, developing the capacity and skills of local, regional and national CSO so that they may be actively involved in the project.
- Providing for transfer of equipment to partner CSO following the successful conclusion of a project.



Evaluation/Monitoring

- Including a civil society perspective in the evaluation of a project/programme's activities (level of CSO participation, how consultations with civil society were integrated in the development of the project/programme, etc.).
- Listening and reacting to specific points raised by CSO regarding the activity/project/programme concerned.

Key documents and other resources

- The CoE's [Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#)
- [Promotion and Implementation Strategy of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#)
- [The Committee of Ministers' Thematic Debate on "The Role and the functioning of Non-Governmental Organisations \(NGOs\) in the Council of Europe"](#)
- [Recommendation \(2007\)14 on the legal status of NGOs](#)
- Website of the [Directorate General of Democracy – Civil Society Participation](#)