

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DRAFT GUIDELINES ON CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

I. Scope and definitions

It is fundamental to define the **concepts** properly and their acronyms. In our opinion, NGOs are include in the so-called “**Civil Society Organizations**” (**CSOs**).

For example, **the International Monetary Fund (IMF)** considers that the term **CSO** refers to the wide range of citizens’ associations that exists in virtually all member countries to provide benefits, services, or political influence to specific groups within society. CSOs include business forums, faith-based associations, labor unions, local community groups, nongovernmental organizations (**NGOs**), philanthropic foundations, and think tanks. Branches of government (government agencies and legislators), individual businesses, political parties, and the media are usually excluded.

<https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/pdf/civ.pdf>

For the **Organization of American States (OAS)**, “Civil Society Organization” is understood to mean any national or international institution, organization, or entity made up of natural or juridical persons of a nongovernmental nature¹.

Others consider that CSOs are defined as organized civil society and come in many forms, some informal and formal entities, such as NGOS, business and faith based organizations, among many others. This is when a group of individuals come together for a common purpose, as in to fulfill a particular mandate driven by need.

On the other hand, a definition of **Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)** could be “A non-governmental organization is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by

¹ Article 6 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states that “it is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development. This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy.”

The presence of civil society participation since 1999, including local groups and broad networks of NGOs and social actors, has contributed to reaching the hemispheric goals of strengthening democracy, protecting human rights, and promoting integral development and multidimensional security as well as other initiatives under way in the OAS that are a part of the inter-American agenda.



people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution.

Consequently, the concept of NGO is restricted to a certain type of organization, whereas **CSOs is a much broader term**.

Therefore, it would be more appropriate to refer to CSOs (including NGOs) in [Point 3](#), second paragraph.

II. Conditions and Principles

With regards to the independence of NGOs, it would be convenient to underline the overall independence of all **CSOs**.

III. Enabling Environment

NGOs are treated in 4 out of 6 points. As previously stated, it would be more appropriate to use the term “**CSOs**”.

IV. Prerequisites for meaningful civil participation

In [Point 12](#), we suggest including the idea that “**decision-shaping**” can play a role in the **decision-making** processes. The latter applies to all levels of government, as indicated in point 1, paragraph 1, whereas the former –*decision-shaping*– could apply to CSOs in accompanying or flanking governmental policies. This is what ADESyD/SWIIS pursues.

The idea could be the following:

“Civil participation provides a platform for a genuine exchange of opinions and enriches the decision-making process, through decision-shaping, ensuring that real public needs are met”

In our opinion [Point 14](#) is too ambitious because of the reason previously explained.



VI. Ensuring meaningful civil participation in practice.

We recommend to revise [point 40](#): *“Member states should adopt the guidelines...”*

In our opinion, the CoE should adopt these guidelines to harmonize this participation, as other International Organizations do, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), where ADESYD has been granted a CSO status.

Attached you will find *“Guidelines for Participation by Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities”* or in this link:

http://oas.org/en/ser/dia/civil_society/index.shtml