

## BACKGROUND NOTE

### Fourth edition of the Civil Society Forum

Monday 5 June 2023

#### **Context**

Civil society actors have played an important role in the process of elaborating and adopting the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005 (hereinafter “the Convention”), by creating a global movement of non-governmental stakeholders.

[Article 11](#) of the Convention recognises the fundamental role of civil society in the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and stipulates that Parties shall encourage the active participation of civil society in their efforts to achieve the objectives of the Convention, for example by:

- Participating in the development of cultural policies through consultations with public authorities;
- Acting as agents of change, proposing new ideas and approaches in the development of cultural policies, for example in the digital environment;
- Providing information and carrying out data collection to contribute to informed policy-making and the preparation of quadrennial periodic reports.

In addition, the [Operational Guidelines on the “Role and Participation of Civil Society”](#) offer considerable opportunities for civil society organizations (hereinafter “CSOs”) to participate in the work of the governing bodies<sup>1</sup> of the Convention at the international level, for example by:

- Becoming accredited observers at the sessions of the governing bodies: on average, around fifty organizations participate regularly in the meetings of the governing bodies;
- Submitting written contributions to the governing bodies on the priorities defined by the Parties;
- Actively contributing to the discussions of the governing bodies before decisions are taken.

Since 2017<sup>2</sup>, the governing bodies of the Convention have engaged more actively CSOs in the implementation of the Convention and participation in their statutory meetings. For example:

- The inclusion of an item concerning civil society in the agenda of the Committee;

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<sup>1</sup> The 2005 Convention is composed of two governing bodies: the [Conference of Parties to the Convention](#) and the [Intergovernmental Committee](#) for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

<sup>2</sup> Since the Convention’s entry into force in 2007, 24 decisions concerning the role and participation of civil society in the implementation of the Convention had been taken by the governing bodies. The Secretariat had prepared over 20 working and information documents on questions that concern civil society and the Convention in order to enable them to make informed decisions. Finally, by the end of 2019, the Secretariat had organised over 15 events (exchange sessions, debates) specifically dedicated to engaging civil society in the implementation of the Convention. The decisions and documents are available on the website of the Convention: <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/governing-bodies>.



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- Facilitating the process of requesting for admission to statutory meetings by civil society representatives;
- Holding a working session between the Bureau and civil society representatives prior to the sessions of the Committee in order to examine the items on the agenda and the priorities of Parties and CSOs. Civil society therefore has the opportunity to pose questions directly to the Chairperson and the members of the Bureau of the Committee;
- Organizing a Civil Society Forum every two years, prior to the Conference of Parties, in order to provide a framework for exchange and cooperation between CSOs and reinforce their contributions to the agenda of the governing bodies
- Requests for activity reports of civil society by the governing bodies on a regular basis;
- The inclusion within the framework of the quadrennial periodic reports of Parties a form dedicated to measures and initiatives implemented by civil society organizations.

The decisions and actions of the governing bodies highlight the importance given to the role and participation of CSOs, so as to ensure they are given a voice in the implementation of the Convention and that they are involved in the discussions and decisions taken during statutory meetings.

The degree of involvement extended to CSOs in the Convention is unprecedented in international law. No other international convention allows CSOs to play such an active role in its implementation.

### ***Previous editions of the Civil Society Forum***

The Civil Society Forum is an opportunity for the representatives of CSOs with interests and activities in the fields of the Convention to structure their participation, define specific cooperation activities and mobilise support for the preparation of their reports.

The first edition of the Civil Society Forum is primarily based on this objective, which was held on 12 June 2017 at UNESCO Headquarters. At the end of the Forum, [a report on the activities of civil society](#) was produced and outlined the challenges encountered by CSOs in the implementation of the Convention. Issues linked to governance, sustainable development, the safeguarding of cultural exceptionalism, the homogenization of culture, access to data and the mobility of artists and cultural goods featured among the challenges identified by CSOs.

The [second edition](#) of the Civil Society Forum took place at UNESCO Headquarters on 2 June 2019. In addition to allowing the representatives of CSOs to examine their concerns and discuss the issues related to the implementation of the Convention, the Forum enabled CSOs to formulate proposals to the Conference of Parties on matters or issues that they consider to be a priority and wish to see them taken into account in the agenda of the work of the governing bodies. The workshops organised during this edition focused on the identification of good practices to improve the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital era, the strengthening of the Convention's international cooperation and assistance mechanisms in partnership with CSOs, the collaboration between UNESCO Chairs and CSOs in the context of developing public policies for culture and sustainable development and finally, overcoming barriers to the mobility of artists and culture professionals.

The [third edition](#) of the CSO Forum was held online, on 31 May 2021. Beyond its role as a platform for CSOs and professionals in the fields covered by the Convention to discuss the



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challenges and relevant solutions for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, this edition of the CSO Forum allowed civil society representatives to develop collective recommendations so as to inform the work of the governing bodies of the Convention (and in particular on the future activities of the Committee for the 2022-2023 period), to raise awareness among the public of the objectives of the Convention and to encourage its implementation within a larger community of civil society representatives. This edition of the Forum was centred on the following four thematic modules: 1) Culture and sustainable development, 2) Sustainable ecosystems for the cultural and creative sectors, 3) Participation of civil society in the implementation of the 2005 Convention and 4) Digital environment, rights and trade.