



# Civil Society

**Civil society.** Refers to the associations of citizens (outside their families, friends and businesses) entered into voluntarily to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies. The term does not include profit-making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector). Of particular relevance to the United Nations are mass organizations (such as organizations of peasants, women or retired people), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people's organizations, religious and spiritual organizations, academe and public benefit non-governmental organizations.

[A/58/817](#) (11 June 2004): We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance; Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations (Glossary, page 13)

## UN Entities

- **The UN and Civil Society:**  
<https://www.un.org/en/get-involved/un-and-civil-society>
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
  - Social Development Issues - Civil Society: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/civil-society>
  - NGO Branch: <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/ngo/about>
  - Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations: <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/ngo/committee-on-ngos>
  - Integrated Civil Society Organizations System: <http://esango.un.org/civilsociety/login.do>
- UN Department of Global Communications (DGC)
  - Civil Society Unit: <https://www.un.org/en/civilsociety>
  - List of CSOs Associated with the Department of Global Communications: <https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/list-csos-associated-department-global-communications>
  - UN Academic Impact: <https://www.un.org/en/academicimpact>
  - Non-Governmental Liaison Service: <https://www.un.org/en/civilsociety/ngls>
- UN Democracy Fund: <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/>
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – Civil Society: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/civil-society>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – Civil Society: <http://www.fao.org/partnerships/civil-society/en/>
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) - Partnerships: <https://www.iaea.org/about/partnerships>
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) - Partnering with civil society: <https://www.ifad.org/en/partners/ngos>
- International Labour Organization (ILO) - Civil Society & ILO Partnership: <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/civil-society-ilo-partnership>
- International Monetary Fund - Civil Society and the IMF: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Partners/civil-society>
- International Maritime Organization (IMO) - NGOs: <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/ERO/Pages/NGOs.aspx>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Civil Society: <https://www.iom.int/civil-society>
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU) - Working Together - Civil Society: <https://www.itu.int/en/cop/Pages/civil-society.aspx>

- UN Women – UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – Civil Society: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/civil-society>
- UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) – Our Partners – NGOs & CBOs: <https://unhabitat.org/our-partners/>
- UN Conference on Trade and Development – UNCTAD and Civil Society: <https://unctad.org/civil-society>
- UN Development Programme – UNDP and civil society: <https://www.undp.org/partners/civil-society-organizations>
- UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) - Civil Society and Community Based Organisations: <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/partners-and-stakeholders/civil-society>
- UN Environment Programme (UNEP) – Civil society engagement: <https://www.unep.org/civil-society-engagement>
- UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – NGOs and Foundations: <https://www.unesco.org/en/partnerships/ngo-foundations>
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA) - Civil Society & Parliamentarians Civil Society & Parliamentarians: <https://www.unfpa.org/strategic-partnerships/civil-society-and-parliamentarians>
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Non-Governmental Organizations: <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/our-partners/non-governmental-organizations>
- UN Children’s Fund – UNICEF civil society partnerships: <https://www.unicef.org/partnerships/civil-society>
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) - Relations with Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO): <https://www.unido.org/igo-ngo>
- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) - UNODC Engagement with Civil Society on Drugs and Crime: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ngos/cst.html>
- United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) - Governance, Participation & Civil Society: <https://www.unrisd.org/en/research/themes/governance-participation-civil-society>
- World Food Programme - Partnering with WFP – for NGOs: <https://www.wfp.org/partnering-with-wfp-for-ngos>
- World Health Organization (WHO) - Civil society and NGO engagement: <https://www.who.int/about/collaboration/civil-society-and-ngo-engagement>
- World Trade Organization (WTO) - Relations with Non-Governmental Organizations/Civil Society: [https://www.wto.org/english/forums\\_e/ngo\\_e/intro\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/intro_e.htm)
- World Bank and Civil Society: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/partners/civil-society>

## Selected UN documents

- A/HRC/57/31 (4 July 2024): Civil society space: report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/57/31>  
Submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 53/13.
- A/HRC/56/57 (23 April 2024): Participation of civil society organizations seeking to express international solidarity through transnational, international and regional networks: report of the Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity, Cecilia M. Bailliet: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/56/57>  
Submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 53/5.
- A/HRC/RES/53/13: Civil society space: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 13 July 2023: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/53/13>
- A/HRC/53/38/Add.4 (23 June 2023): General principles and guidelines on ensuring the right of civil society organizations to have access to resources : report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/53/38/Add.4>

- A/HRC/51/13 (30 June 2022): Civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society: report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/51/13>
- A/HRC/RES/47/3: Civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 12 July 2021: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/47/3>
- A/75/893 (2 June 2021): Letter dated 21 May 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General: <https://undocs.org/A/75/893>  
Contains: Recommendations for ensuring meaningful civil society participation at the United Nations: from ambition to action.
- A/HRC/44/50 (13 May 2020): Ten years protecting civic space worldwide: report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/50>
- A/HRC/44/25 (20 April 2020): Civil society space: engagement with international and regional organizations: report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/25>
- A/HRC/40/52 (1 March 2019): Impact of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders: report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/52>
- A/HRC/RES/38/12: Civil society space: engagement with international and regional organizations: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 6 July 2018: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/38/12>
- A/HRC/RES/32/31: Civil society space: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016: <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/32/31>
- A/HRC/32/20 (11 April 2016): Practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society, based on good practices and lessons learned: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/32/20>
- A/61/817 (18 April 2007): Declaration and Plan of Action of the International Civil Society Forum for Democracy on the Occasion of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies: <http://undocs.org/A/61/817>
- A/59/354 (13 September 2004): Report of the Secretary-General in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations: <http://undocs.org/A/59/354>
- A/58/817 (11 June 2004): We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance: report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relation (Cardoso Report): <http://undocs.org/A/58/817> and <http://undocs.org/A/58/817/Corr.1>
- A/57/118 (27 June 2002): Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the involvement of civil society organizations other than non-governmental organizations and the private sector in technical cooperation activities: experiences and prospects of the United Nations system : <http://undocs.org/A/57/118> and <http://undocs.org/A/57/118/Add.1>
- Further UN documents on the topic "Civil Society" – *click [here](#)*

## Selected Publications available online

- Civil Society and Disarmament: 2022 B Flat, B Sharp, Be Inspired: voices of Youth (UNODA, 2022): <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4010003>  
Civil Society and Disarmament : 2022 is a compilation of stories reveals the hope for a better future shared by members of the largest generation in history, and it show. The stories exemplify #Youth4Disarmament's work to increase youth participation, amplify the perspectives of young people and build constructive partnerships together."
- If I disappear: global report on protecting young people in civic space (UN Envoy on Youth, November 2021): <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4014684>

This is a research report, commissioned by the United Nations Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, with the financial support of the Government of Norway. The paper is a joint civil society, youth-led and United Nations initiative, with the support of the Protection Working Group of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security.

- Working with ECOSOC - an NGOs Guide to Consultative Status (2018): <https://ecosoc.un.org/en/ngo/guide-to-consultative-status>
- OHCHR Publications: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/civil-society>

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