



RECLAIMING SPACE

Civil Society Strategy
and Engagement Forum

Outcome Document

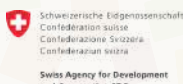
July 7-9 2026
Geneva

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Forum Overview

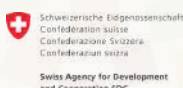
In recent years, migration governance has operated within an increasingly restricted global context. Civil society actors, especially those from migrant-led, grassroots, and marginalised communities, encounter rising barriers to meaningful participation in international processes. These include visa restrictions, financial constraints, and diminishing civic space, all of which influence who can engage and whose perspectives are included in global policy discussions.

The Forum was guided by two overarching themes, grounded in two practical questions: What do we do in a context where the rule of law is not consistently upheld, and how can we talk about migrant rights in those conditions?

Within this context, the Forum created a **dedicated space** for civil society and allies to speak openly about the pressures facing civil society, the erosion of rights, shrinking civic space, reduced funding, and the growing difficulty of influencing migration governance in a world that feels hostile, fragmented and transactional. The Forum set out to strengthen the capacity, coordination and strategic engagement of civil society actors in shaping migration governance across multistakeholder and thematic processes. This meant creating a space for civil society actors to exchange experiences, methodologies, and advocacy approaches across regions and thematic areas; strengthening practice capacities for engagement with Member States and international processes; and tearing down silos across different spaces.

-  **Day 1 set the scene.** A civil society-led multistakeholder dialogue brought civil society priorities, including youth representatives, into direct conversations with Member States, UN representatives, and donors.
-  **Day 2 turned to capacity building.** Civil society split into core groups that remained consistent throughout the day, moving through parallel thematic workshops on climate mobility, social protection and human rights, gender, and diaspora and community engagement, then reconvening after each session to debrief and engage in peer-to-peer learning.
-  **Day 3 took that work into practice.** Participants prepared for and conducted visits to Permanent Missions in Geneva before wrapping up an intense yet engaging and productive Forum.

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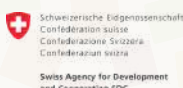
Forum Delegation

The Civil Action Committee selected a delegation of **28 representatives for the entire Forum**. Due to visa difficulties, **23 of the 28 participants** were finally able to attend. The delegation reflected a wide range of lived experiences and perspectives, with participants residing in 18 countries and territories and representing 15 nationalities across most regions of the world.

A further **20 people** joined the multistakeholder sessions, representing Member States' Permanent Missions, UN Agencies, donors and other stakeholder groups.



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Core Groups Methodology

The Forum piloted a cohort-style approach for the second day. Civil society participants organised into five (5) core groups that stayed consistent during the day, giving trust and sustained exchange a chance to build and flourish.

The core groups worked alongside informal networking time and open workshop sessions, with participants allocated based on interest and space availability and engaged with different thematic areas facilitated by civil society leaders.

After each session, every core group reconvened to debrief and build capacities together, guided by prepared questions, to share what participants had learned across the different workshops they attended.

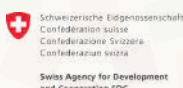
Workshops Approach

Throughout the Forum, six (6) workshops were designed and delivered by civil society leaders on the following:

- Climate mobility, livelihoods and local realities.
- Social protection, human rights and labour rights.
- Gender and participation in migration governance.
- Community engagement and the diaspora.
- Advocacy tools for engagement with decision-makers.
- Preparing for diplomatic engagement.



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Key Takeaways

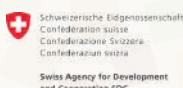
Civil society, governments, the UN and financial institutions operate within a constantly evolving political landscape, facing competing priorities and shrinking resources. The discussions at the Forum put into perspective the role of each actor at the international level and what it means to carry out advocacy and implement policies in such an environment.

On this, the main takeaways that emerged are:

- Despite the erosion of international laws and human rights standards, these principles remain fundamental to multilateralism. Their importance should be reaffirmed and reinforced by national policies, regional mechanisms, and existing legislative instruments/bodies.
- Regression in migration policies and in political and public discourse on migration places civil society work at risk, including by introducing new punitive legislations/practices against their work and by endangering the safety of human rights defenders.
- It is essential to build, sustain and renew multistakeholder solidarity and partnerships among actors with complementary objectives to facilitate access to resources, funding, and spaces. Collective actions remain a key strength in addressing the barriers.



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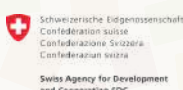


Key Takeaways on Civil Society Engagement in Global Migration Processes

- Engagement requires sustained multistakeholder interactions and preparatory activities pre- and post-IMRF.
- Participants reported that structured methodologies to develop more strategic engagement greatly helped their planning. These identified:
 - Key objectives (e.g. what can this engagement achieve);
 - Where can civil society have influence;
 - What collective efforts are there to amplify messaging;
 - Entry points for collaborations with national and local governments;
 - Follow-up mechanisms.
- Shifting away from reacting to anticipating and shaping outcomes, which often requires creating opportunities to co-design the agenda or establishing areas of influence.
- Defining the success or efficacy of these processes depends on the actors involved. While governments, civil society, and UN institutions use different indicators, the baseline should always focus on changing narratives, upholding human and migrants' rights, and ensuring accountability in implementation.



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Key Takeaways on Civil Society Advocacy for Interactive Dialogue Spaces

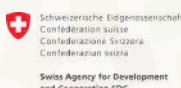
On building effective civil society advocacy for dialogue

- Trust is the baseline of any dialogue: based on the feedback from participants, one element that emerged is that the right format starts by building trust among participants. Core groups can be a way to develop that trust with each further interaction.
- The workshop approach, combined with peer learning, can support knowledge sharing; however, it needs to be implemented with adequate timing and sufficient interactions to allow each participant to contribute and reflect on how to put their learning into practice in their own thematic and geographical area of work.
- Building true solidarity and a sense of community between civil society and aligned stakeholders is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of engagement, knowledge exchange, and collaboration. Not only does this support trust-building and the transfer of knowledge, but it is also essential to everyone's mental health.

On building effective advocacy strategies

- Narratives on migration underpin all possibilities for progression or regression. Without serious consideration of how public discourse and language around migration, and the main drivers of that discourse, affect a national, regional or international context, advocacy messaging will be limited in any thematic.
- Civil society continues to struggle to articulate the 'how' of advocacy goals and messages. Further capacity and collective skills development is needed for actors to effectively communicate the details of the collected messaging.
- Backsliding on respect for international human rights and the rule of law continues to be the major issue preventing effective and impactful advocacy. Civil society needs to collectively understand the effects of this new landscape and learn how to strategise accordingly.

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Key Recommendations

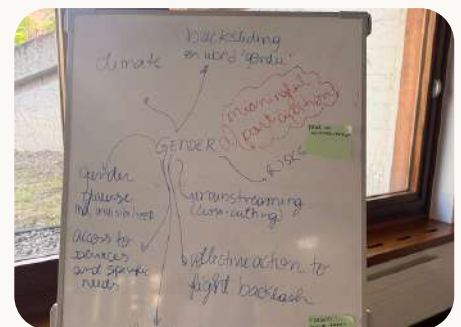
- There is a strong need for more multi-stakeholder dialogues, solidarity-building between civil society and stakeholders, and sustained engagement among stakeholders between international governance milestones. These are crucial for establishing the mutual trust, knowledge exchange and understanding needed to best take advantage of advocacy and policy-making opportunities.
- Capacity and confidence building for civil society leaders, particularly those from grassroots and migrant communities, are crucial to ensuring they are able to make the most of advocacy and dialogue opportunities.
- The role and importance of diaspora communities remain unevenly understood and undervalued across regions and countries, and must be analysed more systematically, incorporated, and supported to achieve sustainable development. Participants were struck by how difficult it was to identify concrete mechanisms for their engagement and support, as well as by how diaspora-related conversations existed in silos across different sectors.
- Civil society needs to innovate and collaborate to streamline concrete actions that can still make a difference. For instance, identifying soft law standards and binding treaty bodies that can be called upon; engaging with and supporting litigation efforts to protect migrant and migrant workers' rights; mutual aid networks.
- Civil society need better advocacy coordination and a strategic understanding of opportunities across the community and local government levels, national dialogue spaces, regional platforms, and the international level.
- Human mobility discourse and rights/protection messaging urgently need to be strategically connected to other international relations spaces, such as social development, trade, and security.

Effective Practice Guidelines for Impactful Multistakeholder Engagement

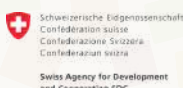
Multistakeholder engagement and participation have long been upheld as a crucial pillar of democracy, extending into the multilateral governance space as being core to ensuring policymaking with societal relevance to the ground. However, in recent years this has been contradicted by reduced resources to support civil society work and stakeholder participation, as well as by shrinking civic space – all amidst ever-growing challenges such as climate change and conflict that face the world as a whole.

These effective practice guidelines were drawn from the reflections and feedback of representatives from civil society (grassroots to international networks), national governments, international organisations, and international processes attending ‘Reclaiming Space: Civil Society Strategy and Engagement Forum’ held on 7-9 July 2026. Drawing on learnings from decades of engagement across more than 25 international, regional and national processes, projects and fora, participants were able to dive deeper in dedicated sessions into the question of:

‘What enables impactful multistakeholder engagement?’



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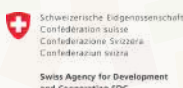


Essential Conditions for Impactful Multi-stakeholder Engagement

- **Relationship Building:** Relationships among stakeholders, particularly between civil society/grassroots and decision-makers, are key to sustained engagement, dialogue and collaborative opportunities for advocacy. This requires:
 - Creating opportunities for formal and informal dialogue before, during and after a process or event – stakeholders need to meet to build a relationship.
 - Ensuring focal points are in place to create connections across other relevant focal points per thematic or region, including those working across processes, offices, and departments, for example in national governments.
 - Ensuring effective handovers when a focal point rotates or changes. Relationships are often lost during these periods of change, leading to drop-offs in stakeholder engagement and contact.
- **Ensuring participating stakeholders have the skills and confidence to engage:** Barriers to building relationships are not only a lack of knowledge and opportunities to connect, but also a need to build confidence from the grassroots, being able to see beyond official positions to connect on a human level.
- **Sustainable core funding:** Due to the significant work involved in following, engaging with and contributing to any policymaking process, stakeholders require sustainable, predictable resources before participation can be determined, to ensure the necessary time and capacity can be invested.



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Essential Elements for a Process / Space with Impactful Multi-stakeholder Engagement

-  **Co-creation and co-ownership:** Stakeholders must be meaningfully involved at all stages of a process or policy-making cycle, from understanding the needs and contexts on the ground to ensuring the design is relevant to affected communities and that implementation is effective, and its efficacy is measured. When stakeholders are involved superficially, for example through ad hoc consultations at stages where details have already been determined, the risk of irrelevance and inaccuracy is high.
-  **Institutionalising a sustained ecosystem of collaboration beyond milestones:** Stakeholders must have access to an ecosystem of consistent engagement, relationship-building and collaboration beyond policy-making and advocacy milestones (such as, for example, regional forums and United Nations events). This enables the trust-building required for effective collaboration at such significant touchpoints and ensures the open avenues necessary to build inclusive pathways, as well as for co-creation, co-design, co-ownership, and constant feedback.
-  **Sustainable and predictable targeted funding, advanced timelines for decisions, and non-negotiable space for participation:** Dedicated resources and consideration for stakeholder participation and engagement are crucial to impact. These resources and concrete information (for example, registration confirmations, invitation letters, etc.) must be appropriately allocated, with timelines that take into account budget planning and visa timelines.
-  **Democratic self-selection and respect for self-organisation:** A large number of civil society actors, including migrant communities and associations, already organise themselves into democratic networks, alliances and unions – working in tandem to build up leaders, representational processes and consensus power. When determining representatives for delegate, speaker, and negotiator positions, it is absolutely crucial that these are chosen through such collective decision-making, and these processes and structures must be respected as key aspects of affected communities' agency.

Acknowledgements

Cuisine Lab

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Cuisine Lab for providing the catering and refreshments throughout the three days of the Forum. Coming together around food, sitting at the same table and sharing flavours from different parts of the world became one of the most memorable parts of the event.

To recognise their work, we asked the Director, Sajad Fotuhi, to share some words about their work to highlight in this outcome document:

“Cuisine Lab is a social enterprise based in Geneva that uses food as a tool for inclusion, training and professional integration. We work with talented chefs and hospitality professionals from refugee and migrant backgrounds, giving them opportunities to develop their skills, gain professional experience and share the flavours and culinary traditions of their home countries.

Through our catering services, private events and restaurant activities, we aim to create meaningful encounters between cultures while supporting people in building sustainable professional futures in Switzerland.”

To learn more about Cuisine Lab, check out their website

<https://www.cuisinelab.ch>



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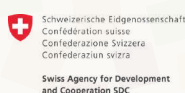
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