

# MANUAL FOR MEMBERS

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### Colophon

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### Author

Peter Sarosi, Rights Reporter Foundation

### Reviewer

Katrin Schiffer, Correlation-European Harm Reduction Network

### Editor

Graham Shaw, Graham Shaw Consulting Limited

### Support

All members of Working Group 3 of the EU Civil Society Forum on Drugs

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De Regenboog Groep/Correlation-European Harm Reduction Network  
Stadhouderskade 159  
1074BC Amsterdam  
Netherlands  
[info@civilsocietyforumondrugs.eu](mailto:info@civilsocietyforumondrugs.eu)  
[www.civilsocietyforumondrugs.eu](http://www.civilsocietyforumondrugs.eu)



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## Introduction

This manual was prepared by the Civil Society Forum on Drugs (CSFD) to guide its members about how can they benefit from being a Forum member in their national advocacy efforts, as well as how can they contribute to European-level advocacy by providing an input to the work of the CSFD. The members of CSFD have a responsibility to bridge national and local level stakeholders and the European level stakeholders. In this manual we provide an overview of civil society involvement in the field of drug policies in Europe, we explain how the CSFD works, what are the responsibilities of members and how they can fulfil these responsibilities effectively.

## Why civil society involvement is essential in the field of drug policies?

Civil society is considered an essential part of sustainable and inclusive development, good governance and responsible citizenship. The importance of civil society involvement in policy making, including the development and implementation of drug policies, is widely recognized. According to the Green Paper adopted by the European Commission on the role of civil society in drugs policy in the EU, "civil society often bears considerable responsibility for implementing at local level the sort of actions that are set out in the EU Action Plan on Drugs, especially in achieving the objectives on drug prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug users." Civil society organisations play a key role in providing health and social services and they implement the majority of prevention programs in most EU member states. In addition to being service providers, CSOs make a major contribution to protecting the human rights of the most vulnerable groups of society, they are a source of innovation and they often make the decision-making system more accountable and transparent, improving the monitoring and evaluation of policies. It is in the interest of both decision makers and CSOs to establish mechanisms to facilitate dialogue between civil society organisations and policy makers at the local, national and international levels.

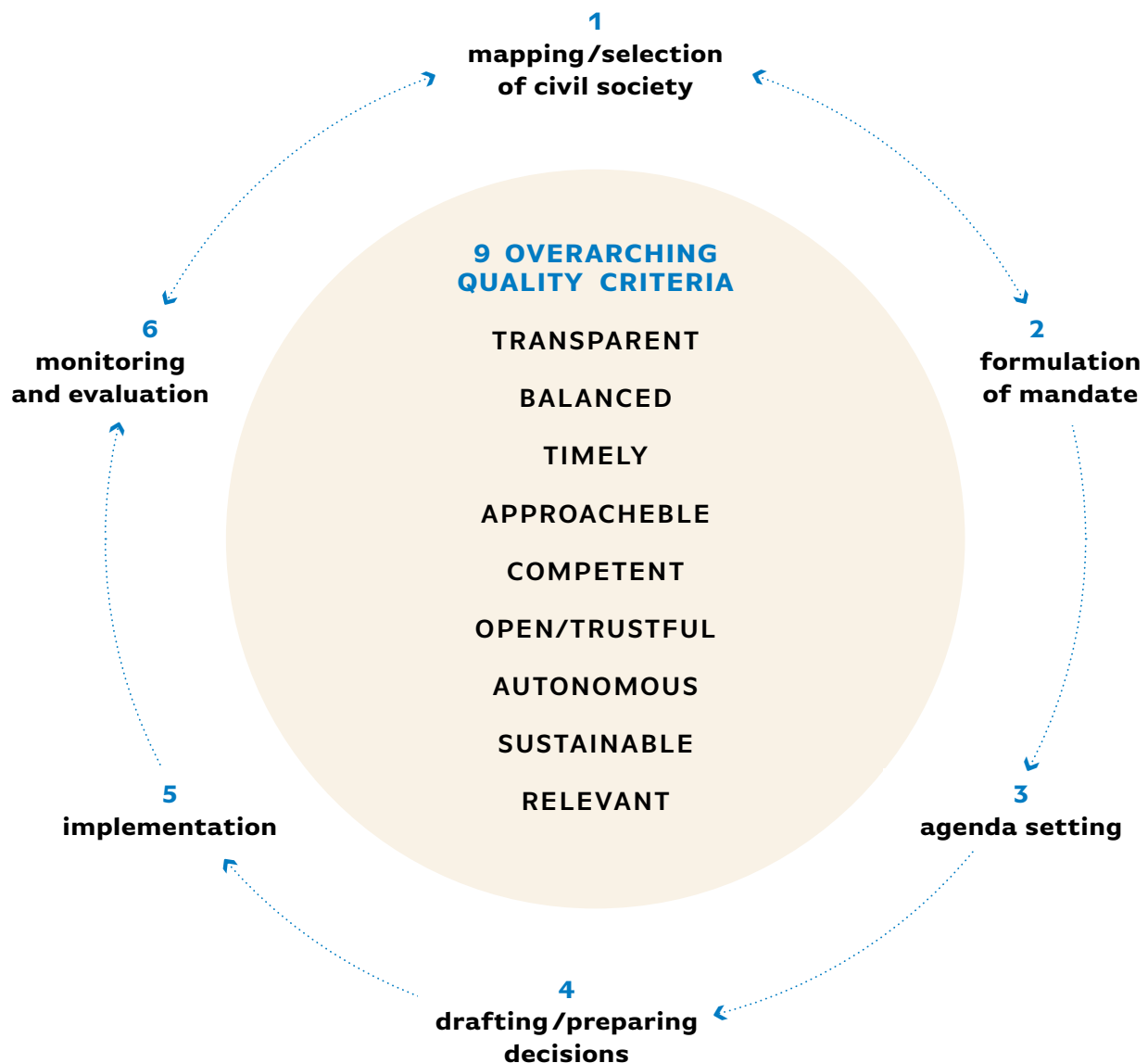
## The State of Civil Society Involvement in Europe

According to a 2021 survey conducted by the CSFD among 80 CSOs in 26 European countries, there are some basic civil society involvement mechanisms in the most European countries. But a stable, regular partnership between civil society and governments was reported by less than 17 percent of respondents. A formal, institutionalised mechanism to involve civil society into drug policy decision making was reported only from seven countries, only four of which has a drug focus only. Our research pointed out that the existence of civil society involvement mechanisms, even if they are advanced, is only a necessary but not sufficient factor to make

civil society involvement meaningful – that is, of good quality. Some CSOs reported that the impact of existing civil society involvement efforts was weak and did not result in effective cooperation. But how can we measure the quality of civil society involvement?

## Civil Society Involvement Quality Standards

In 2020, the CSFD conducted a literature review to assess existing guidelines and recommendations on how civil society can be involved in policy making in a meaningful way. Based on the findings of the review, it created quality standards of civil society involvement to guide both decision-makers and civil society on how to create mechanisms that facilitate the building of dialogue and partnership between them. The quality standards consist of a six-steps cycle to design, implement and monitor/evaluate civil society involvement mechanisms, as well as nine overarching principles that should be applied at each step of the cycle (see the graph below).



This tool is intended to be used as a practical, step-by-step guideline for both policy makers and civil society actors to assess/improve existing civil society involvement mechanisms and to design/implement new mechanisms. With the help of the quality standards, the CSFD's assessment report identified significant gaps in the quality of existing CSI mechanisms. Even though structured mechanisms exist to involve civil society this involvement is not always meaningful. For example, governments do not listen to opposing views from civil society, or if they listen, they do not act upon civil society demands. Only a small minority of CSOs feel that they are heard – in a stark contrast to the vast majority of CSOs reported the existence of structured mechanisms. And funding for CSI mechanisms is missing.

**We believe that we can only bridge these gaps by strengthening the cooperation and networking within civil society on both the European and on the national/local level.**

## Civil society involvement on the European level: CSFD

The [CSFD](#) is an expert group of the EC. Its membership comprises approximately 45 civil society organisations (CSOs) from across Europe, representing a variety of drug policy fields, and a variety of stances within those fields. Its purpose is to provide a broad platform for a structured dialogue between the Commission and the European civil society which supports drug policy formulation and implementation through practical advice. The momentum for the CSFD's formation can be traced back to the [Green Paper on the Role of Civil Society in Drugs Policy in the European Union \(EU Green Paper Reference\)](#).

## How is the CSFD organised?

Members of the forum are selected by the EC, based on a pre-defined application procedure. The CSFD's mandate is refreshed every three years. The current CSFD is selected and active from 2021-2023.

Plenary meetings are organised in Brussels, at least once every year, and the core group also has one face to face meeting per year outside the plenary. Between meetings we discuss and allocate work packages, and share and monitor progress, via teleconferences, email and other communication channels as appropriate.

## Working Groups

The CSFD organised itself into a working group for each of four broad thematic areas. The current distribution of themes among working groups:

WORKING GROUP 1 (WG1)	<b>EU Drug Policy</b>
WORKING GROUP 2 (WG2)	<b>Relations with International Institutions</b>
WORKING GROUP 3 (WG3)	<b>Civil Society Involvement with National Drug Policies</b>
WORKING GROUP 4 (WG4)	<b>Emerging drug policy and cross-cutting issues</b>

## Governance

Overall, the CSFD is governed by a core group, comprising of the four Chairs of the working groups, along with a Chair and Vice-Chair of the forum itself. These are all elected by the members of the forum at the plenary meeting. Current core group members:

CHAIR	<b>Laurene Collard</b>	<i>Federation Addiction</i>	<a href="mailto:l.collard@federationaddiction.fr">l.collard@federationaddiction.fr</a>
VICE CHAIR	<b>Katrin Schiffer</b>	<i>CORRELATION</i>	<a href="mailto:kschiffer@correlation-net.org">kschiffer@correlation-net.org</a>
WG1 CHAIR	<b>Iga Jeziorska</b>	<i>YODA</i>	<a href="mailto:iga.kender-jeziorska@euro-yoda.org">iga.kender-jeziorska@euro-yoda.org</a>
WG2 CHAIR	<b>Adria Cots Fernández</b>	<i>IDPC</i>	<a href="mailto:acotsfernandez@idpc.net">acotsfernandez@idpc.net</a>
WG3 CHAIR	<b>Peter Sarosi</b>	<i>RRF</i>	<a href="mailto:sarosip@rightsreporter.net">sarosip@rightsreporter.net</a>
WG4 CHAIR	<b>Milutin Milosevic</b>	<i>DPNSEE</i>	<a href="mailto:milutin.milosevic@dpnsee.org">milutin.milosevic@dpnsee.org</a>

You can find more information about the work of individual thematic working groups and the key documents they produced on the [website of the CSFD](#).

## What are the responsibilities of Forum members?

CSFD members have the responsibility to attend the plenary meetings and actively participate in the intersessional work of the working groups. Each member has to join at least one thematic working group (but members are allowed to join multiple working groups if they are able to attend WG calls and actively contribute to the preparation of documents). Each working group is facilitated by the WG chair who is responsible for scheduling meetings, preparing their agenda, leading the work on implementing decisions and report back to the Core Group and the Plenary/European Commission on the progress. WG calls are organised through online communication channels (regularity depends on the actual tasks ahead of the working group, mostly bimonthly).

An administrative requirement for each Forum member is to provide annual updates in the European Transparency Register, to prove that they work in a transparent and accountable manner as an organisation.

Forum members can participate in designing research projects, creating questionnaire surveys, preparing position papers and training events, coordinated by the lead of the WG. Members are responsible for completing surveys produced by the CSFD and collect and provide data, contacts on national/local drug policies in their country.

Forum members are expected to

- a** actively participate in the meetings organised by their working groups;
- b** disseminate calls to participate in research projects in the national level (distributing online questionnaires, in special cases, identifying stakeholders for interviews, focus groups etc.);
- c** disseminate calls to participate in events organised by the CSFD in the national level (e.g. training courses);
- d** facilitate the organisation of national/local events organised by the CSFD;
- e** promote documents, position papers, research reports, videos etc. produced by the CSFD at the national level;
- f** highlight good practices and/or challenging developments from their country that have a European relevance.

### How can members organise work in the national level?

Each CSFD member serves as a focal point in the member state where the organisation is based. This means that members should make an effort to reach out to broad spectrum of civil society organisations when they collect data and/or disseminate CSFD materials. It is important to understand that one single CSO – and its representative at the CSFD –, even if it has extensive experience and knowledge, may not have enough insight into all aspects of drug policies in a country. Drug policies require a complex, balanced and multidisciplinary approach. This means that there is a need for a balanced and multidisciplinary response from civil society as well. CSFD members do not represent the whole civil society in their countries with its diverse views, ideological backgrounds and fields of work.

For example, a CSO working in the field of harm reduction should make sure that the call for participants in research surveys are distributed among organisations in the field of prevention, treatment/recovery, communities of people who use drugs as well. CSOs working in a specific region/city should reach out to CSOs working in other regions/cities. CSOs should consult with the groups of communities with lived experience, former and active drug users and their loved ones.

In this work, the following activities can help:

- Using the existing national and local level networks and umbrella organisations that enable CSOs working in specific fields (prevention, treatment, harm reduction etc.) to collaborate. These networks usually have online communication channels, newsletters, meetings, conferences that can be used as platforms to disseminate CSFD documents and assess the situation.
- If there is no such network in a country, it is recommended to set up at least an informal network of CSOs working in the field of drug policies to share experiences, knowledge and to prepare common positions about developments.
- CSOs should advocate for government funding on advocacy and consultation related work, not only on services. If civil society involvement is part of the national drug strategy, they should point out that adequate resources are needed to implement this objective. If it is not, CSOs should advocate for adding it to the next document.
- National/local conferences on drug policy related issues can be used to promote the positions of the CSFD, as well as other relevant EU documents, to present the findings of CSFD reports.
- Members can organise online meetings/focus groups among CSOs to collect data/input about general or specific drug policy related issues.