



INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND FACTSHEET

The IMF and Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are now more vocal than in the past. They are experts in economic issues and their influence expands to parliaments and governments. Whether national, regional, or international, the way CSOs do business has been profoundly affected by globalization. CSOs increasingly employ extensive networks to pursue their activities and to try to influence policies on a broad range of issues. Many CSOs focus on economic matters at the core of the work of the IMF and other international organizations. The IMF is committed to being transparent about its work, to explaining itself, and to listening to the people whom it affects, and it engages with CSOs through information sharing, dialogue, and consultation at both the global and national level.

What is civil society?

The IMF uses the term “civil society organization” to refer 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.

What is the basis for CSO-IMF engagement?

Over the years, the IMF has become more transparent and has sought to become more accountable—not only to the governments that own it but also to the broader public. This has led to more active involvement with CSOs as well as legislatures. When the IMF began to engage with CSOs in the 1980s, it was usually at a global level, in response to advocacy by groups concerned with economic and social justice. Engagement at the country level, especially in low-income countries, and at the global level remains central in IMF-CSO relations.

As the IMF’s policies have evolved—for instance, its increased focus on [promoting poverty reduction in low-income countries](#) through a participatory approach, and its emphasis on transparency and [good governance](#)—outreach and communication have become an integral part of IMF country work as well. The Fund has become committed to:

- being **transparent** about its work. Dialogue with CSOs is an important channel for communication;
- fostering a culture of **listening and learning**. CSOs can highlight important issues, offer information to supplement official data, and provide insights that may differ from perspectives in official circles; and
- strengthening **country ownership** of policies, which is essential to successful stabilization and reform. Constructive dialogue with CSOs can help build mutual understanding and increase support for reform.

Reflecting the importance to the IMF’s work of dialogue with CSOs, a [Guide for Staff Relations with Civil Society Organizations](#) was distributed to IMF staff by the Managing Director in 2003 and published on the IMF website (www.imf.org). The note encourages IMF staff to continue to increase outreach and gives practical advice on issues arising from interaction with CSOs. The IMF is in the process of revising and updating the guidelines with [input from CSOs](#).

How does the IMF engage with CSOs?

The issues that feature in CSO-IMF engagement evolve, but some are always at the forefront: IMF policy advice, especially to low-income countries; the social and environmental implications of IMF advice; debt relief; program conditionality; trade policy; governance and transparency; and the voice and representation of developing countries in the IMF and World Bank.

At the global level, the IMF's engagement with CSOs takes a variety of forms, including:

- contacts between IMF management and CSO representatives, in both small meetings and larger forums;
- [public consultations](#) on the Fund's policy and strategy papers;
- meetings and seminars with IMF staff—and Executive Directors—at Fund headquarters and worldwide on specific policy or country issues;
- invitations by the IMF to contribute to reviews of its policies, by attending seminars or by providing comments to papers posted on its external website;
- a [Civil Society Policy Forum](#) organized jointly with the World Bank, which runs in parallel with the Annual and Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank. Sessions cover a wide range of topics, most of them organized by CSOs themselves; and
- participation in the CSO Fellowship Program during the Annual and Spring Meetings.

The [Independent Evaluation Office](#) (IEO) also maintains regular contacts with CSOs, which have been among the most active providers of feedback, comments, and suggestions to the IEO's evaluations.

In individual countries, engagement with CSOs takes several forms. The IMF Managing Director regularly meets with CSOs when she visits a country. Staff [surveillance](#) missions make a point of meeting with CSOs—for example, labor organizations and think tanks. In the context of program design and negotiations in low-income countries, missions often meet CSOs that are engaged in the consultative process of preparing [poverty reduction strategies](#). And IMF resident representatives routinely engage in outreach to CSOs.