

2018 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Middle East and North Africa

Overview The 2018 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for the Middle East and North Africa reports on the strength and overall viability of the CSO sectors in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, and, for the first time, Libya. It addresses both advances and setbacks in seven key components or “dimensions” of the sustainability of civil society sectors: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. The CSOSI is intended to be a useful source of information for local CSOs, governments, donors, academics, and others who want to better understand and monitor key aspects of sustainability in the CSO sector.

The CSOSI provides a comprehensive assessment of the capacity of civil society to serve as both a short-term partner in implementing development solutions and a long-term actor in ensuring that development outcomes are sustained. The CSOSI empowers local civil society actors to collectively assess not only the environments in which they operate, but also their own capacities to advocate, operate sustainably, and communicate with citizens. Allowing local civil society to self-identify their development challenges is the first step in promoting resiliency and long-term self-reliance.

The CSOSI is produced by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with FHI 360, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), and a local implementing partner in each participating country. A total of 72 countries across the globe were surveyed in various editions of the CSOSI in 2018.

Results CSO sustainability in the Middle East and North Africa remained challenged in 2018. The legal environment scores declined in five countries, as legal obstacles to CSOs’ work continued to mount. New restrictive laws and practices included amendments to cybercrime laws in Jordan and Egypt that gave authorities broad license to restrict expression, registration challenges in Yemen and Lebanon, more cumbersome requirements on notifying the government of activities in Yemen and Libya, and state harassment (including forced closure and asset freezes) in Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. In Yemen, Libya, and Egypt, legal duplication or uncertainty created confusion and additional burdens. While advocacy activities were still severely curtailed in Egypt and Yemen, there were some notable advocacy successes in the region, including CSO-influenced legal reforms in Iraq and Lebanon, and other policy successes in Libya and Morocco. Advocacy scores improved in three countries - Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition, as CSOs called for change more vocally, there were signs that the public in some countries have become more receptive to their role in society. CSOs reported increased media coverage of their activities in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, all three of which noted improved public image scores in 2018. Meanwhile, in line with the restricted civic space and lack of advocacy, CSOs in Egypt and Yemen continued to be smeared by government and media outlets.

The 2018 CSOSI regional reports can be found at <https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index-reports>.

Explore historical CSOSI data at <https://www.csosi.org>.

