



# EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS OF ECUADORIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THEIR ROLE IN DEMOCRACY

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### **Investoria Foundation**

The Investoria Foundation is a civil society organization, officially established on August 26, 2021, under registration number MIES-CGAJ-DOS-2021-0420-M from the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES). The foundation is dedicated to promoting sustainable development through research and the creation of social projects, with a focus on reducing social, economic, and environmental inequalities. It partners with local governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and universities to develop solutions that improve collective well-being across Ecuador and Latin America, contributing to a more just and equitable society. Investoria's work centers on key areas such as gender and diversities, climate action, democracy and open government, and global development agendas, all approached through a citizen-centered and inclusive lens. We ensure that all individuals and communities have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the path toward sustainable development.

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# List of abbreviations

**CSO:** Civil Society Organization

**GAD:** Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado (Decentralized Autonomous Government)

**HIAS:** Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

**IAF:** Inter-American Foundation

**OIM:** Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (International Organization for Migration)

**POA:** Plan Operativo Anual (Annual Operational Plan)

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization

**SUIOS:** Sistema Único de Información de Organizaciones Sociales

**USAID:** United States Agency for International Development

**GIZ:** Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)

**UNICEF:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

**MINTEL:** Ministerio de Telecomunicaciones y de la Sociedad de la Información (Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society)

**MIES:** Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social (Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion)

**LGBTQI+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and others

**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

# Executive summary

This research report, developed by Fundación Datalat in collaboration with Fundación Investoria and supported by USAID, provides a detailed analysis of the emerging Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) landscape in Ecuador in the LACLEARN Initiative<sup>1</sup>. The study focuses on organizations established within the last five years, examining their roles in promoting democracy, governance, citizen participation, transparency, and accountability. These organizations have been pivotal in addressing challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, social conflicts, political instability, and long-standing structural issues such as poverty and corruption. However, emerging CSOs face considerable operational hurdles, particularly in securing financial resources, enhancing financial accountability, and forming strategic partnerships.

The research is based on a comprehensive data collection process, including workshops and surveys conducted from July to August 2024, across seven key cities: Ibarra, Esmeraldas, Cuenca, Quito, Puyo, Lago Agrio, and Guayaquil. The findings offer valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and opportunities experienced by emerging CSOs across these diverse regions of Ecuador.

The report is organized into key chapters that detail the structure, challenges, and strategies of Ecuadorian CSOs. Initial sections present the methodology, which includes surveys, workshops, and Civic Labs that collect diverse civil society perspectives. Further chapters explore themes like financial and operational capacity, political and security challenges, and digital engagement strategies. Each section highlights regional case studies and the unique challenges faced by CSOs in varied contexts across Ecuador.

The research underscores the importance of supporting CSOs through stronger local partnerships, improved financial sustainability, and inclusive leadership. Key recommendations include fostering digital skills, simplifying legal recognition processes, and enhancing collaboration with national and international organizations to build sustainable networks. Strengthening CSOs in these ways will enable them to navigate political and security challenges more effectively, fostering resilient democratic engagement in Ecuador.

## Key Findings

**Motivations for Action:** Emerging CSOs are driven by a strong sense of urgency to address systemic challenges such as inequality, corruption, and the defense of marginalized communities' rights. In Quito, youth-led initiatives focus on governance and mental health, while in Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas, organizations are at the forefront of advocating for Indigenous rights, social justice, and environmental protection. Guayaquil's CSOs illustrate the

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<sup>1</sup> This study on civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador is part of a broader research initiative undertaken in collaboration with Grupo FARO in the LACLEARN Initiative. The research aligns with the objectives of the LACLEARN Ecuador Responsive Governance project, aiming to understand and strengthen democratic governance by examining CSO dynamics at the national and subnational levels.

influence of private sector interests, shaping their organizational missions in response to the local ecosystem.

**Barriers to Participation:** Emerging CSOs face common challenges, including bureaucratic obstacles and financial constraints. Smaller cities like Ibarra and Esmeraldas struggle with weak local government partnerships and limited funding access, while in larger cities like Quito and Guayaquil, newer organizations compete with well-established CSOs for resources. Additionally, CSOs in Lago Agrio must navigate political dynamics and compete for limited resources, especially in regions affected by extractive industries.

**Gender Dynamics:** Gender plays a significant role in the leadership of emerging CSOs. Women hold the majority of leadership positions in regions like Esmeraldas, Ibarra, and Lago Agrio, while in Cuenca and Guayaquil, participation remains more male-dominated. Notably, non-binary representation is growing, particularly in Quito, reflecting broader efforts to foster inclusivity within Ecuador's civil society landscape.

**Digital Platforms as Catalysts for Change:** Across all regions, CSOs are increasingly leveraging social media and digital tools to engage with communities and mobilize resources. In urban areas like Quito, with stronger access to international networks, organizations have successfully adopted digital strategies to amplify their work. In contrast, in remote areas such as Puyo and Lago Agrio, digital platforms are critical for overcoming logistical and geographic challenges, enabling CSOs to connect with stakeholders and operate effectively despite limited infrastructure, including 1) internal CSO limitations, such as a lack of essential equipment and digital tools; 2) poor internet bandwidth and digital access quality in remote areas like Puyo and Lago Agrio; and 3) logistical barriers, including unreliable electricity and minimal support services, which hinder effective digital engagement and outreach.

**Collaboration and Strategic Alliances:** Collaboration between CSOs and institutions from other sectors varies widely by region. CSOs in Quito have successfully built partnerships with international donors and academic institutions, enabling them to drive innovation and broaden their impact. Conversely, CSOs in Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas rely heavily on hyper-local collaborations due to limited access to national or international partners. Despite these challenges, many CSOs aspire to scale up their partnerships with global entities such as USAID, GIZ, and UNICEF, recognizing the importance of cross-sector alliances for sustaining and expanding their efforts.

**Public Perception and Advocacy:** In smaller cities like Esmeraldas, Sucumbíos, Puyo, and Ibarra, emerging CSOs face significant challenges related to how they are perceived by the public. They often deal with mistrust from local authorities and opposition from established political interests. This situation differs between smaller and larger cities. In larger urban areas, organizations typically struggle to connect with local authorities, while in smaller cities, CSOs find themselves in a difficult position. They must choose whether to be seen as opponents or allies of local authorities, which complicates their independence and limits their ability to advocate for public issues.

Organizations that focus on sensitive topics, such as human rights and environmental protection, often operate in challenging political environments. To succeed in the long run,

these CSOs need to reshape public perceptions and actively build trust within their communities. Establishing strong relationships and enhancing their public image will be essential for overcoming the challenges they face and maximizing their impact.

## Regional Highlights

**Quito:** A hub for innovation, international collaboration, and youth participation, Quito's CSOs benefit from their proximity to academic institutions and global funders, driving advancements in governance and human rights advocacy.

**Guayaquil:** Shaped by a commercially driven environment, CSOs in Guayaquil are influenced by private sector partnerships. However, bureaucracy and resource limitations pose challenges to scaling their operations.

**Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio:** Represent the frontline of grassroots activism, particularly in Indigenous rights, social justice, and anti-extractive advocacy. CSOs in these regions operate with limited legal status and funding, yet their resilience allows them to continue their critical work.

**Cuenca and Puyo:** While promising in terms of youth and Indigenous leadership, CSOs in these areas are constrained by limited technical capacity and financial resources, impeding their ability to scale.

# 1. Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in fostering social change, promoting transparency, and encouraging citizen participation in Ecuador. This study focuses on emerging CSOs—those established in the last five years—which have demonstrated their potential to drive democratic engagement and address pressing issues in their communities. However, these organizations face significant challenges, including the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited access to funding, and political instability. Additionally, structural problems such as poverty, corruption, and a lack of formal recognition further hinder their ability to operate effectively.

Previous research, including the 2022 study by Grupo FARO and CEOESC, has highlighted the financial and technical challenges faced by Ecuadorian CSOs, particularly in financial accountability and building partnerships. Despite this, there has been a lack of comprehensive studies addressing the unique challenges, opportunities and circumstances of emerging CSOs. This research aims to fill that gap by focusing specifically on these newly established organizations and their roles in fostering democracy, governance, and accountability.

The national registry (SUIOS) indicates that over 6,000 CSOs have been formed in Ecuador over the past five years, yet data gaps hinder a full understanding of their impact. These organizations, while facing significant barriers, are driven by a desire to address social, economic, and political issues that are often overlooked by the state. This study seeks to explore the motivations, innovations, and strategies that have enabled these emerging CSOs to overcome challenges and contribute to societal change.

Recognizing the need for better documentation and analysis, particularly at the subnational level, this research was designed to examine the role of emerging CSOs in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance. By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, including a nationwide survey and participatory workshops in seven cities across Ecuador, the study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by these organizations.

The research findings will offer valuable insights into how these CSOs operate in diverse contexts, including urban centers like Quito and Guayaquil, as well as in more remote areas such as Lago Agrio and Puyo. By understanding the regional dynamics, this study will provide recommendations for strengthening the capacity and sustainability of emerging CSOs in Ecuador, ensuring their continued impact on democratic processes and community development.

## 2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the emergence and influence of new Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador, specifically those formed since 2020, as explained below. The methodology is designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to address the general objective and specific research questions, focusing on CSOs' impact on democracy, governance, citizen participation, transparency, and accountability, as well as their presence and strategies in the digital space.

### Objectives and research questions

#### General objective

To explore the emergence and influence of new CSOs in Ecuador, to understand their impact on Democracy, Governance, Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Accountability at both national and local levels, including their presence in the digital space, and to identify the innovative approaches and strategies that these emerging CSOs use to drive political changes and strengthen democratic engagement.

#### Specific objectives

- To identify the motivations, characteristics, and challenges of emerging CSOs in Ecuador.
- To recognize the actions, capacities, and innovations of emerging CSOs in promoting more democratic, inclusive, and participatory spaces.
- To recognize the capacity of emerging CSOs in Ecuador to utilize the digital space to promote their goals and engage with their target audiences.

#### Research questions:

1. What are the characteristics and challenges of emerging CSOs in Ecuador?
2. What are the key factors driving the emergence of new CSOs in Ecuador, including economic, social, cultural, security and political?
3. What innovation and sustainability strategies have CSOs developed to influence democracy, governance, citizen participation, transparency, and accountability?
4. How do emerging CSOs in Ecuador utilize the digital space to promote their goals and engage with their target audiences?

### Data collection

The study's research design combines a nationwide survey and localized participatory workshops. This dual approach allows for the collection of broad, representative data across Ecuador, while also capturing in-depth qualitative insights from specific regions. The methodology aims to explore both the statistical trends in CSO characteristics, and the nuanced challenges and opportunities faced by these organizations.

## Quantitative approach - emerging CSOs survey

A study of population was established by considering both registered (*de jure*) and unregistered (*de facto*) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). As of June 25, 2024, there were 62,018 registered CSOs listed in the SUIOS national registry, of which 5,961 had been established since 2020, making them the target population for this study. From this population, a non-probabilistic statistical sample was calculated using a 90% confidence interval and a 10% margin of error, resulting in a sample size of 68 registered CSOs.

On the other hand, since unregistered CSOs are not formally listed with any state institution, no defined universe exists for these organizations. To address this, the goal was to survey at least 50 unregistered CSOs that meet the criteria of being established in the last five years and actively working on democracy and governance in Ecuador. This brought the total study sample to 118 CSOs. Therefore, given the undefined universe and the lack of official registration for unregistered CSOs, the analysis has limitations in terms of generalizations. However, to mitigate this limitation, the survey data was complemented and contrasted with qualitative insights gathered from local workshops.

While this research offers valuable insights into the characteristics, challenges, and innovations of emerging CSOs in Ecuador, certain limitations should be noted. Primarily, the absence of a defined universe for non-registered CSOs limits the ability to generalize findings to all CSOs nationwide. Non-registered CSOs, which are often informal and operate without visibility in official registries, present challenges in defining their scope and reach across Ecuador. To address this, data from the survey was enriched and contextualized with qualitative insights from local workshops, providing a balanced perspective. Nonetheless, caution should be exercised in extrapolating these findings to the entire CSO landscape in Ecuador, especially in terms of size, structure, and operational capacity, as non-registered CSOs may face unique barriers not fully captured here.

The survey consisted of 35 questions divided into three sections:

1. **Section I: Organizational Data and Representative Information** – Focused on characterizing the CSOs.
2. **Section II: Technical Capacity, Impact, and Innovation** – Explored the activities, structure, and innovative practices of the organizations.
3. **Section III: Civic Space** – Examined the contextual limitations and challenges faced by the CSOs.

The survey was conducted digitally via the Typeform platform, and all data was collected with the informed consent of the participants, in compliance with data protection laws. The use of the collected data was restricted exclusively to the development of this research project.

The survey was made available from July 5 to August 25, 2024. To ensure maximum reach and participation, the survey was disseminated through various strategies and channels. It was sent via email to the Datalat and Investoria database, which includes 900 registered and 30

unregistered organizations. New email invitations were sent every two weeks to newly identified CSOs, demonstrating a sustained commitment to the dissemination process.

Both Datalat and Investoria formally requested their strategic partners to promote the survey through email and social media networks, significantly enhancing the survey's visibility. The organizations also produced short promotional videos on Facebook and Instagram, highlighting key messages and encouraging participation from all types of CSOs. Additionally, a WhatsApp community was created to invite workshop participants to share the survey within their networks and encourage further participation nationwide.

It is important to note that a total of 264 CSOs participated in the national survey. However, only 169 of these organizations were classified as emerging CSOs (those established since 2020). Therefore, only the responses from these emerging CSOs were included in the analysis. All collected data was processed, cross-referencing relevant variables, and analyzed using descriptive statistics to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

## **Qualitative approach - workshops**

The regional workshops aim to explore and analyze the key factors influencing the emergence, operation, and sustainability of emerging Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador. Utilizing a participatory approach, these workshops focus on identifying the primary motivations driving CSOs, the challenges and barriers they face, and innovative methods for incorporating citizen participation into their initiatives.

The workshop methodology involved four stages:

1. **Presentation of Project Objectives and Expected Results:** An overview of the workshop's goals and anticipated outcomes was provided.
2. **Participant Introductions:** Each participant introduced themselves and shared information about the work their organizations do.
3. **Group work using a modified World Café method,** where participants rotate through themed discussion tables focused on key issues for emerging civil society organizations in Ecuador, such as enabling environments, sustainability, and innovation. Each group will discuss and generate insights on these topics, which will then be consolidated and shared in a plenary session. This approach encourages active participation, collective ideation, and the identification of common challenges and innovative solutions for CSOs.
  - a. Participants engaged in discussions at three tables, each focusing on different questions:
    - i. Group 1: What motivated the creation of your organization? What motivates you to be part of your organization?
    - ii. Group 2: What goals have you not yet achieved? What barriers are preventing these achievements?
    - iii. Group 3: What methodologies/tools does your organization use to engage the community?
4. **Stakeholder Identification and Closing Remarks:** Participants identified key stakeholders by sector and concluded with closing remarks.

## Conceptual framework

### Legal and Constitutional Context

Article 66, Section 13, of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador guarantees the right to freely associate, assemble, and express opinions. Similarly, Article 96 recognizes all forms of societal organization as expressions of popular sovereignty, aiming to develop processes of self-determination. Organizations may collaborate at various levels to strengthen citizen power, emphasizing the essential role of civil society.

This legal framework opens the door for the formation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador, which can be defined as a "third sector" that coexists and interacts with the state and private industry (UNDP 2015). Civil society organizations emerge as independent and autonomous groups formed by citizens to address specific public interests. These organizations may be formalized through legal recognition or may operate informally without statutes, functioning on consensus.

Civil society organizations share several key characteristics:

1. **Non-profit orientation:** Their primary goal is not economic gain.
2. **Private nature:** They are distinct from the public sector.
3. **Humanitarian purpose:** Most organizations focus on activities that aim to improve societal welfare (Módulo 1 Escuela de Organizaciones Activas FARO).

### Emerging Civil Society

The term "Emerging Civil Society" does not have a rigid theoretical definition; rather, it describes the organic and adaptive ways in which these organizations arise to address immediate societal needs. In this report, "emerging" refers to CSOs established within the past five years, a period that reflects the significant influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on civil society dynamics. The pandemic brought new and urgent challenges, prompting the rapid formation of many CSOs that sought to fill critical gaps in social support, health information, and community resilience. These organizations often began without formal registration due to the immediacy of their work and the need for flexibility. As a result, the five-year timeframe captures this period of accelerated CSO formation and evolving approaches to civic engagement and governance, making it a meaningful benchmark for studying current trends in Ecuador's civil society landscape.

These emerging organizations often intersect with other social issues such as gender and human rights. Therefore, it is important to understand core concepts in this framework:

1. **Governance:** Governance is synonymous with governability and refers to the framework of rules, institutions, and practices that set boundaries and incentives for individuals' behavior within governmental, non-governmental, and private sector organizations. Governance seeks to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of these entities (UNDP 1998).
2. **Accountability and Transparency:** This concept involves the obligation of an organization to report on how it fulfills the responsibilities entrusted to it.

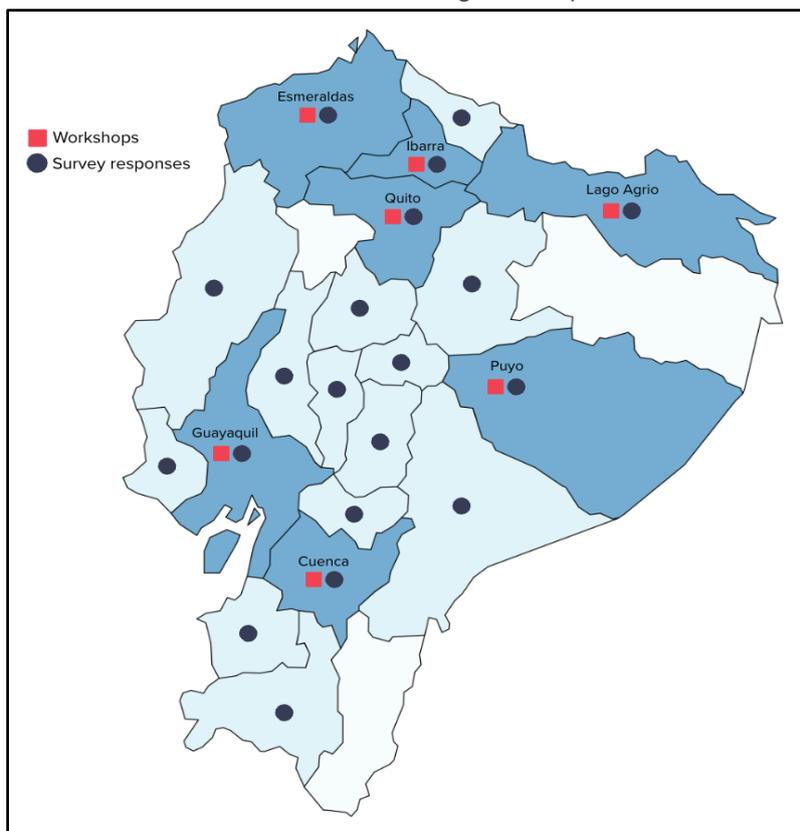
Accountability is critical in promoting democratic and transparent governance (Zumoffen 2022).

3. **Public Policy:** Public policy refers to the dynamic relationship between institutions, processes, and formal and informal expressions aimed at addressing conflicts and providing solutions (Sodaro 2006). Public policy acts as a tool to transform society, determining objectives through the mobilization of state tools (Rivera 2019).

### 3. Research findings

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining insights from both local workshops and a national survey, to provide a comprehensive understanding of emerging Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador. By combining data from both the local workshops and the national survey, this study offers a comprehensive view of Ecuador’s emerging CSO landscape. The analysis highlights critical regional, gender, and organizational differences, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by these organizations.

Illustration 1. Investigation map



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024) and Local Workshops summary (2024)

#### Local Workshops

A total of 222 CSOs participated in seven local workshops held across Ecuador, with varying levels of participation in each city. The workshops were conducted in Lago Agrio, Esmeraldas, Quito, Ibarra, Puyo, Cuenca, and Guayaquil, providing a balanced regional representation of the CSOs' experiences and challenges. Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas had the highest levels of participation, while Cuenca and Guayaquil saw the lowest.

The workshops revealed a mix of registered and non-registered CSOs. While the majority of participants in Guayaquil and Cuenca were registered CSOs (100% and 83%, respectively), Ibarra and Lago Agrio showed higher participation from non-registered CSOs, representing 56% and 63% of the participants, respectively. This distribution illustrates the varying levels of formalization and visibility among CSOs in different regions.

Gender representation was a key factor explored during the workshops. Female participation was particularly high in Esmeraldas (74%) and Lago Agrio (59%), while Cuenca (67%) and Guayaquil (64%) showed predominantly male representation. This gender distribution highlights regional variations in leadership dynamics within CSOs, suggesting that women are more likely to take leading roles in certain regions compared to others. The average age of participants was 37 years, with Lago Agrio having the highest average age (41 years) and Ibarra the lowest (32 years), indicating differences in leadership demographics across the regions.

### **Emerging CSOs Survey**

The national survey further deepened the analysis, involving 264 CSOs across Ecuador. Of these, 169 were classified as emerging organizations—those formed within the last five years. This subset became the focus of the study, as it provided insights into the unique challenges and opportunities these newer organizations face in navigating Ecuador's socio-political landscape.

The survey revealed that 59% of the participating CSOs were registered, while 41% were non-registered. This balance between formal and informal organizations underscores the diversity of the sector and highlights the significant number of CSOs that operate without legal status, potentially limiting their access to funding and formal networks.

Geographically, the survey showed that CSOs were predominantly located in Quito (27%), followed by Guayaquil (12%), with the remaining 61% distributed across smaller cities and rural areas. This geographic breakdown is crucial in understanding how CSOs operate in different contexts, particularly in terms of access to resources and political support.

Gender dynamics within the national survey echoed the findings of the workshops, with 53% female representation and 44% male, alongside a small but notable non-binary presence (1%). This gender distribution highlights a growing trend towards inclusivity, though regional differences persist, as seen in the workshop data.

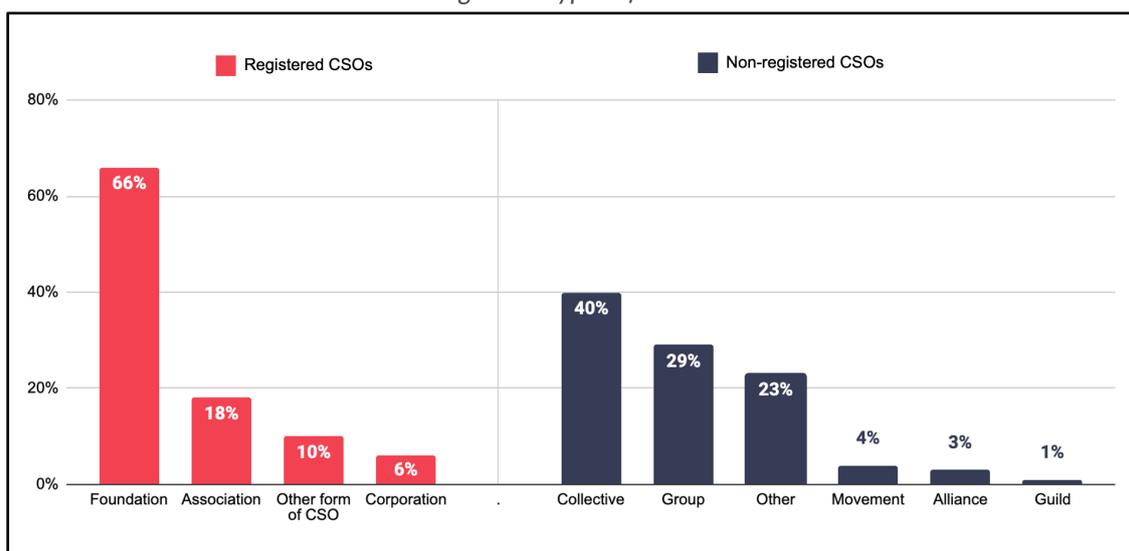
## **3.1 Characteristics of Emerging Civil Society Organizations in Ecuador**

The first section of this analysis characterizes CSOs based on five factors collected through the national survey and local workshops. First, "Types of CSOs" describes the classification of Registered CSOs and Non-registered CSOs. Next, "Organizational Structure" details how CSOs are composed. Third, "Resources" explores the types of resources CSOs have for daily operations. Finally, "Location, Work Areas, and SDGs" delves into the location and areas where CSOs exert influence.

### **Types of CSOs**

59% of the CSOs are Registered CSOs, and 41% are Non-registered CSOs. The Registered CSOs, according to the classification established in Article 4 of Executive Decree 193, are divided into Foundations (66%), Associations (18%), Other Forms of CSOs (10%), and Corporations (6%). Thus, most Registered CSOs are foundations. In contrast, Non-registered CSOs, which operate outside the regulatory framework, do not have a formal classification. However, according to the national survey, they are divided into Collectives (40%), Groups (29%), Others (23%), Movements (4%), Alliances (3%), and Guilds (1%). The "Others" category includes denominations such as Foundations, Associations, Startups, Think tanks, etc. Therefore, most Non-registered CSOs are collectives. It is essential to highlight that Registered CSOs derive their names according to the legal requirements. In contrast, despite analyzing the names and activities of non-registered CSOs, no definitive reasons were found for their chosen denominations.

Figure 1: Types of CSOs



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

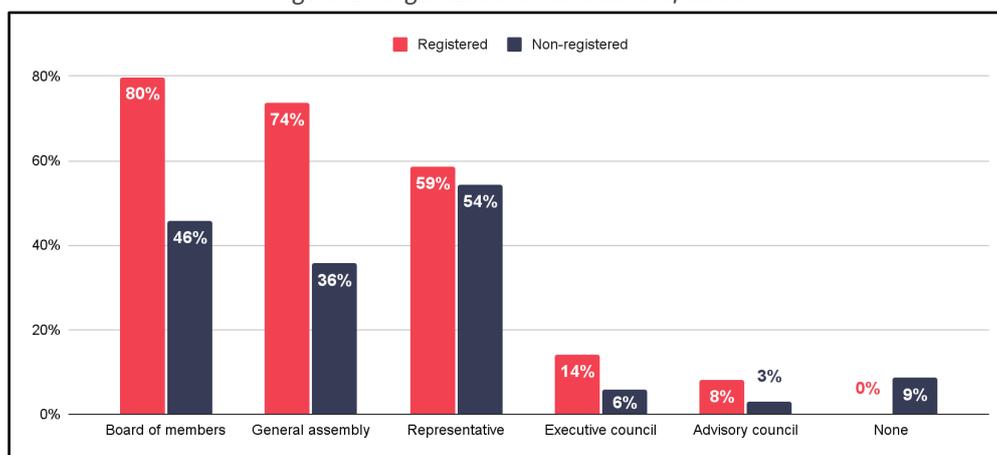
Interestingly, some non-registered CSOs self-identify with categories typical of registered CSOs, mainly foundations and associations. This may happen because they associate these names with specific characteristics. Mainly, when analyzing the activities of Non-registered CSOs that call themselves "Foundations," this designation is linked to social work activities such as "helping vulnerable groups" and "promoting the rights of children and adolescents." Similarly, the name "Association" is used by CSOs whose members share similar characteristics, such as "Association of Rural Women" or "Association of Veterans." Therefore, CSO names go beyond strict legal categories.

Among the 37 institutions authorized to grant legal status to CSOs found in the SUIOS, most are registered with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) at 49%, followed by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights at 11%, with the remaining institutions representing a small percentage. The reasons for this focus on the ease of registration procedures in these institutions and their widespread presence across the country. Section 2, Key Drivers Behind the Emergence of New CSOs in Ecuador, discusses this topic in more detail.

## Organizational Structure

The organizational structure refers to how CSOs distribute functions and responsibilities among various entities. Registered CSOs have a legally defined structure according to their statutes, while Non-registered CSOs do not. Upon examining the most common components of an organizational structure, it is noted that both types of CSOs often have a Board of Members, a General Assembly, and a Representative. This is notable, considering that Non-registered CSOs are not legally required to have a defined organizational structure.

Figure 2: Organizational Structure of CSOs

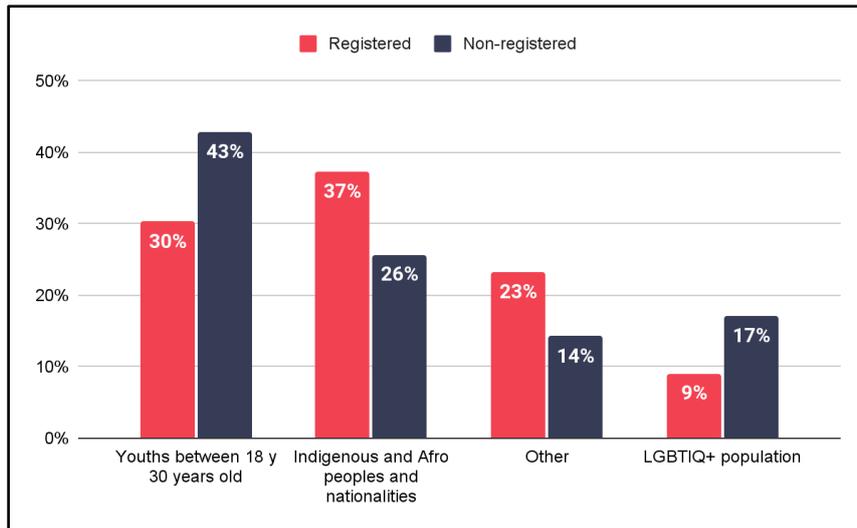


Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

Among these components, the Representative is one of the most significant figures, as they lead and act on behalf of the CSOs. According to the local workshops and the national survey, there are similar trends in gender representation. The workshops indicated that 54% of CSO representatives are female, 45% are male, and 1% are non-binary, while the national survey reported 53% female, 44% male, and 1% non-binary representation. In both cases, it is clear that non-binary individuals are underrepresented in CSO leadership roles. The average age of representatives is 38 years, with Registered CSOs tending to have older representatives (average age of 41) compared to Non-registered CSOs (average age of 35). Registered CSO representatives commonly hold the title of president, while those from Non-registered CSOs often serve as coordinators.

Additionally, CSOs make decisions through a Decision-Making Body composed of more than one member. For both Registered and Non-registered CSOs, this body is typically a General Assembly, which generally meets once a month and primarily comprises female members. Regarding minority group representation, the General Assemblies of Registered CSOs usually include at least one member from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, whereas Non-registered CSOs tend to include at least one member who is a young person aged 18 to 30. There is also a higher representation of the LGBTIQ+ population in Non-registered CSOs than in Registered CSOs.

Figure 3: Representation of Minority Groups



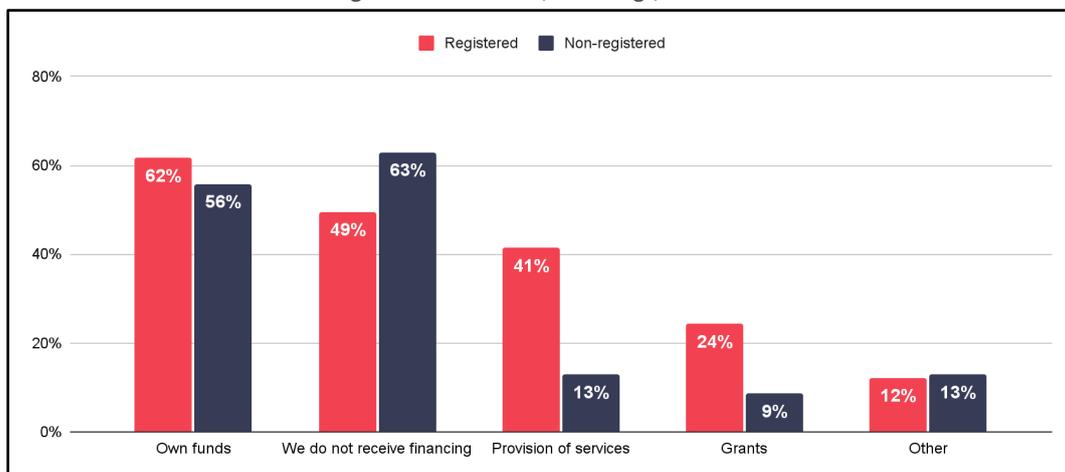
Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

Considering the above and the age of representatives, non-registered CSOs are led by younger individuals than registered CSOs. Furthermore, while Registered CSOs are more institutionalized, Non-registered CSOs, despite lacking formal structures, show positive signs of striving for institutional maturity.

### Resources

CSOs rely on financial, human, and institutional resources, all of which are closely tied to their budgets. Both registered and non-registered CSOs in Ecuador typically operate with annual budgets of less than \$10,000. For registered CSOs, funding primarily stems from self-generated income and service provision, while non-registered CSOs are entirely dependent on self-generated funds. In both cases, this limited financial capacity presents a major challenge, significantly constraining their ability to scale operations, hire paid staff, and sustain long-term projects.

Figure 4: Sources of Funding for CSOs



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

Human resources relate to the personnel affiliated with CSOs. On average, CSOs have about 15 collaborators, with Registered CSOs having more (18) than Non-registered CSOs (13). In both cases, only one collaborator is remunerated on average, with the rest being volunteers. Thus, CSOs heavily rely on voluntary work, and the minimal number of paid staff is directly tied to their limited annual budgets.

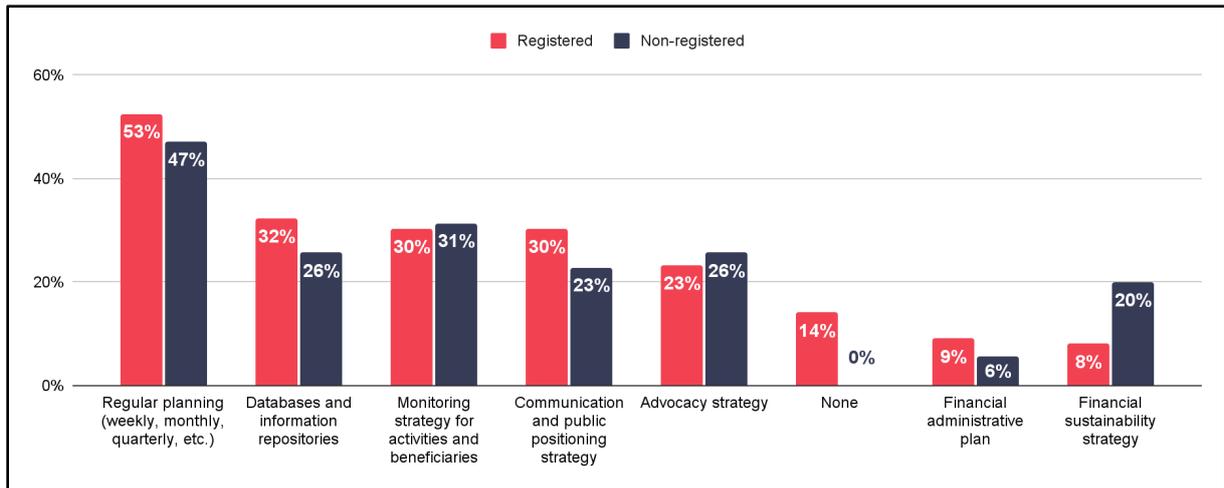
Institutional resources for CSOs encompass the technical, administrative, and financial capacities essential for sustained operations. While many CSOs, both registered and non-registered, have implemented basic resources like regular planning, data repositories, and beneficiary monitoring strategies, only a limited number have established financial or administrative sustainability strategies. This gap in structured financial models largely stems from budget limitations: nearly 90% of these organizations operate on annual budgets of less than \$10,000, which restricts their ability to hire paid staff and hinders their capacity for sustainable growth.

Only a few CSOs in Ecuador have successfully implemented sustainable economic models to support their ongoing activities. Examples from the survey include two registered CSOs that have diversified funding sources, employing models that combine self-generated income with service provision and project-based grants. One CSO, for example, has developed a social enterprise model, offering fee-based workshops and consulting services related to community development, with the revenues directly supporting its advocacy work. Another CSO has partnered with local businesses for sponsorships, creating a reliable income stream for operational costs and community programs. These models showcase how structured economic strategies can improve financial sustainability, though they are rare in the sector.

In general, however, most CSOs rely heavily on volunteer labor, with an average of five team members, only one of whom is compensated. This reliance on volunteerism is both a strength and a limitation; while it enables CSOs to operate with minimal resources, it also restricts their ability to sustain consistent, skilled staff who can drive long-term initiatives. Consequently, most organizations struggle to influence democracy and participation significantly due to these constraints.

To mitigate these economic challenges, CSOs are increasingly turning to innovative approaches, such as forming alliances or networks that allow them to pool resources and enhance their reach. Collaborations with larger NGOs or participation in grant-funded networks help some CSOs access resources that would otherwise be unavailable. These alliances underscore the importance of creative resource management and adaptive strategies, though they also highlight the ongoing need for more sustainable financial planning within the sector.

*Figure 5: Institutional Resources of CSOs*



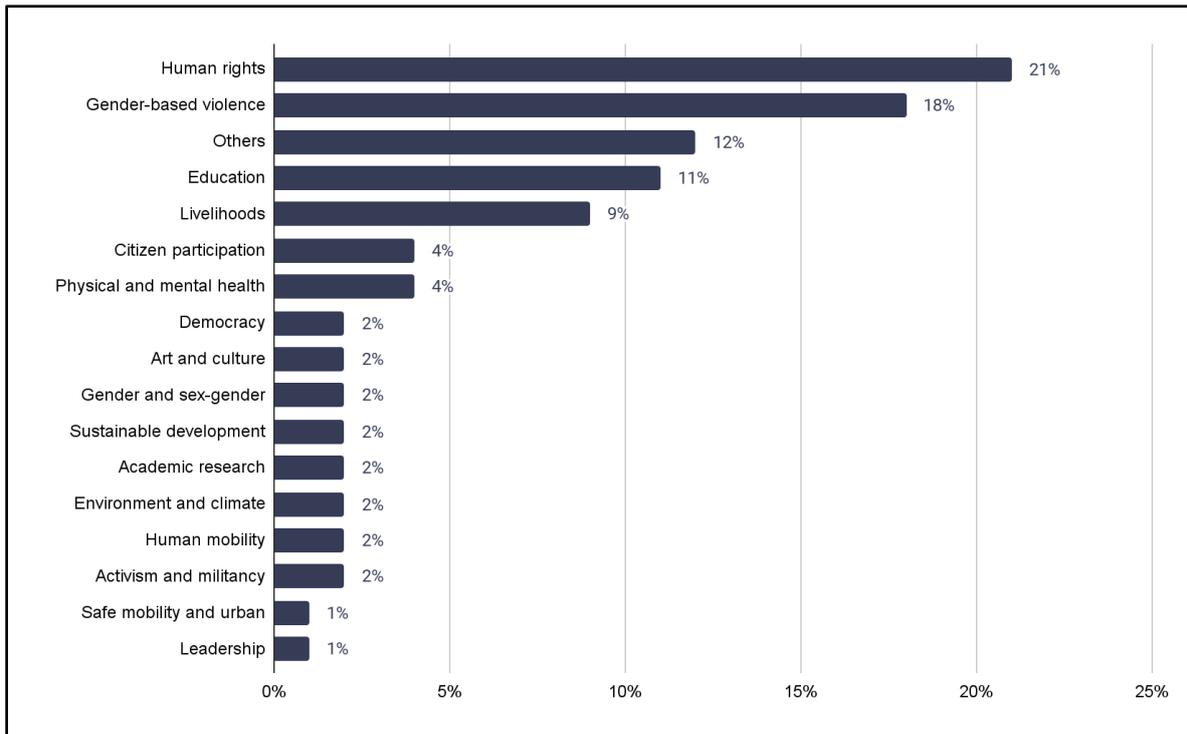
Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

In summary, CSOs lack financial resources, which means they cannot afford paid staff and rely heavily on volunteers. This lack of funding also affects their ability to develop institutional financial resources. The economic and financial factors influencing CSO operations are discussed in more detail in section Factors Reducing Political Participation and Democratic Action.

### Location, Work Areas, and SDGs

Geographically, 27% of CSOs are located in Quito, 12% in Guayaquil, and 61% are distributed in smaller cities like Esmeraldas, Ibarra, and Cuenca. Registered CSOs tend to operate nationally, while Non-registered CSOs primarily focus on provincial, more localized efforts. CSO activities align with various themes, including:

Figure 6: CSO Work Areas



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

The main themes addressed by CSOs include human rights, gender-based violence, education, and other topics like protecting vulnerable groups, sports, and promoting ancestral knowledge. There are no significant differences between registered and non-registered CSOs regarding work areas. However, by gender, only 1% of CSOs led by male representatives address gender-based violence. Educational themes are more relevant to CSOs in Quito and Guayaquil than those in the rest of the country.

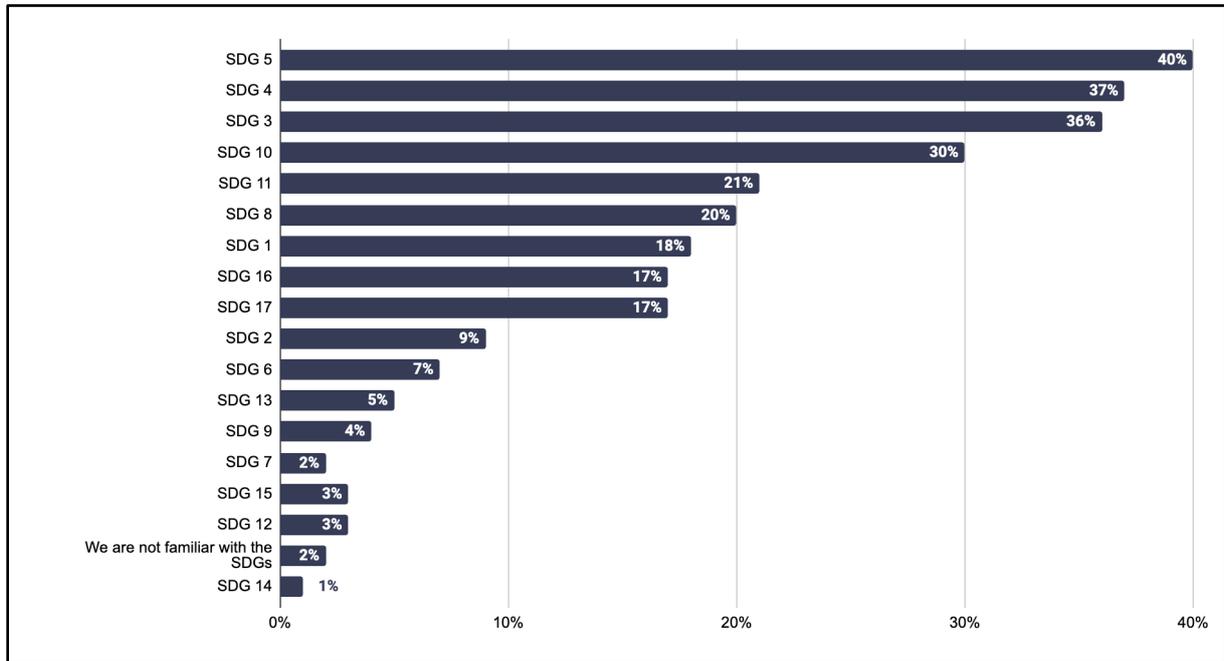
Based on the local workshops, CSOs address similar themes to those identified in the national survey, including sexual and reproductive health, youth and elder care, safe mobility, political advocacy, the rights of Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples, university students' rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and women's rights. Specific themes addressed by the city include:

- Ibarra: LGBTIQ+ and migrant rights, preservation of the Kichwa language, youth participation, and inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Cuenca: LGBTIQ+ rights, gender, civic education, and citizen participation.
- Esmeraldas: Environment, human mobility, and the defense of Afro-descendant peoples.
- Lago Agrio: Youth leadership, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and nature protection.
- Puyo: Education, community participation, and gender equity.
- Quito: Mental health, animal welfare, technology, and urban development.
- Guayaquil: Rehabilitation of youth from drug addiction, democracy, water care, and safe mobility.

CSO activities are closely aligned with the SDGs, with 99% of CSOs recognizing and incorporating them into their programmatic agendas. Predominantly, the SDGs 5 (Gender

Equality), 4 (Quality Education), and 3 (Health) are addressed. Conversely, SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 15 (Life on Land), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and 14 (Life Below Water) are rarely prioritized by CSOs.

Figure 7: SDGs Aligned with CSO Activities



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

To conclude, Registered CSOs mainly consist of foundations registered with MIES, while Non-registered CSOs are mostly collectives. Organizationally, both types of CSOs have a Board of Members, a General Assembly, and a Representative. Representatives in both cases are predominantly female, with those from Registered CSOs often holding the title of president and those from Non-registered CSOs serving as coordinators. Additionally, Non-registered CSOs tend to have younger representatives, aged 35, compared to 41 for Registered CSOs. General Assemblies of both types of CSOs mainly consist of women. However, assemblies of Registered CSOs typically include members from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, while Non-registered CSOs tend to include young people aged 18 to 30.

Both CSOs operate with annual budgets of less than \$10,000, funded primarily through self-generated income, service provision, and grants for Registered CSOs, and predominantly through self-generated funds for Non-registered CSOs. In both cases, the lack of funding remains a critical issue. Moreover, both CSOs rely heavily on voluntary work due to limited paid personnel, despite having regular planning and data management resources. Most Registered and Non-registered CSOs are based outside Quito and Guayaquil; however, Registered CSOs tend to have a national reach, while Non-registered CSOs have more localized, provincial operations. Both focus mainly on human rights, gender-based violence, and education, and their work aligns with SDGs 5, 4, 3, and 10.

## 3.2 Key drivers behind the emergence of new CSOs in Ecuador

This section provides an overview of the critical characteristics of emerging CSOs, the factors determining their establishment, their organizational structures, and the internal and external barriers they face. Based on data gathered from a virtual survey and local workshops, this analysis reveals that although these organizations are primarily driven by the desire to effect social change, their efforts are often hindered by economic and financial constraints, legal and political obstacles, and a complex security environment. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies that strengthen the capacity and sustainability of emerging CSOs, enabling them to maximize their impact and continue serving their communities effectively.

### Critical Characteristics of Emerging Civil Society Organizations

Based on the information gathered from the representatives of the emerging CSOs who participated in the study, one of the main factors driving the creation of these organizations is the motivation to bring about social change in the various areas each organization addresses. This change is pursued collectively through social action. This motivation stems from the need to fill a role that the State does not assume, to work directly with the community, to confront injustices, and to promote social equity and civic participation, among other causes. An essential aspect of CSO action is that they do not necessarily require legal status to be effective, as evidenced by the diverse range of registered and unregistered organizations participating in the study.

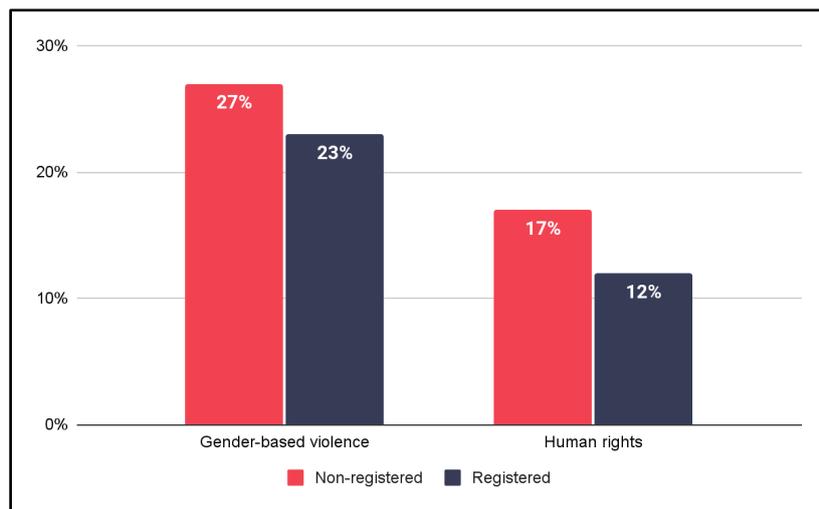
In this study, effectiveness refers to the ability of civil society organizations (CSOs) to achieve meaningful impact within their communities and operational focus areas, regardless of their formal legal status. Effectiveness can be measured through several key indicators beyond financial resources or formal registration. These include:

1. **Community Mobilization and Support:** Effective CSOs are those that can galvanize community involvement and foster active participation in social initiatives. This indicator reflects the organization's success in building trust and engagement with local stakeholders, which is particularly valuable in settings where formal recognition may be limited or non-existent.
2. **Tangible Social Outcomes:** An effective organization contributes measurable improvements in the social issues it addresses. Examples include reductions in violence, enhanced educational outcomes, or improved access to basic services. These outcomes reflect the direct social change that the organization enables within its community.
3. **Policy Influence and Advocacy Success:** Another dimension of effectiveness is the ability of CSOs to shape or influence local policies, even if informally. This includes participating in advocacy that results in policy changes, increased awareness, or heightened accountability among local authorities, which aligns with their mission of promoting social equity and civic participation.

The study underscores that a CSO's impact is not solely contingent on its legal status or funding but also on its ability to mobilize communities, produce tangible benefits, and advocate for policy changes. These measures of effectiveness inform the recommendations on flexible funding mechanisms and potential alliances, as they recognize the value of diverse organizational models in achieving social impact.

The motivations and issues that drive the emerging organizations to take action are mainly the fight against gender-based violence and the promotion of human rights for both formalized and informal organizations, as shown in Figure 8, in an environment in which approximately 65% of Ecuadorian women have experienced some violence in their lives (ECLAC, 2021), and an increase in violent deaths of women for gender-based reasons, which in 2023 reached the number of 277 victims (UN Women, 2024).

Figure 8. Key Focus Topics of CSO Activities



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

The CSOs participating in the workshops, especially in Esmeraldas, Ibarra, and Quito, also provided qualitative information that among their motivations is to protect and defend human rights, gender equity, the empowerment of women in different spheres of society, and social justice, including the fight against discrimination, the defense of minorities, and the promotion of inclusive policies.

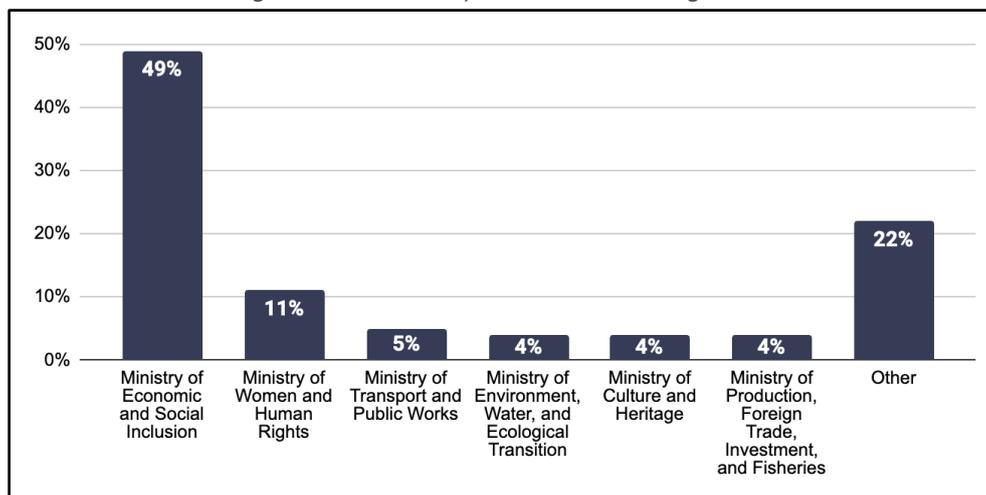
It is also important for organizations in Quito and Guayaquil to address unemployment. They mention that their activities include developing entrepreneurship and economic inclusion to support the development of new businesses, innovative initiatives, employment opportunities, financial education, microcredits, and other resources that promote economic autonomy, especially among the vulnerable.

## Factors determining the establishment and status of Emerging Civil Society Organizations in Ecuador

A total of 264 CSOs participated in the survey, of which 169 are emerging organizations. Within this group, it was found that 59% have legal status. More than half of the registered emerging organizations (65%) are foundations, followed by associations (18%). Among the emerging organizations with legal status, 53.26% are registered with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion. Based on the information gathered from the survey and the workshops conducted, three key factors were identified for this outcome. The first is that, due to its mandate, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion works more directly with society and addresses aspects of social and economic development, including vulnerable groups.

Additionally, the Ministry has an active department for social organizations, which includes those providing state services. Another determining factor is that, by its nature, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion has more active local-level zonal coordinations compared to other government entities. This makes it easier for local organizations to register with the Ministry, as reflected in the disaggregated results, where 59 % of organizations outside of Quito and Guayaquil are registered with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion.

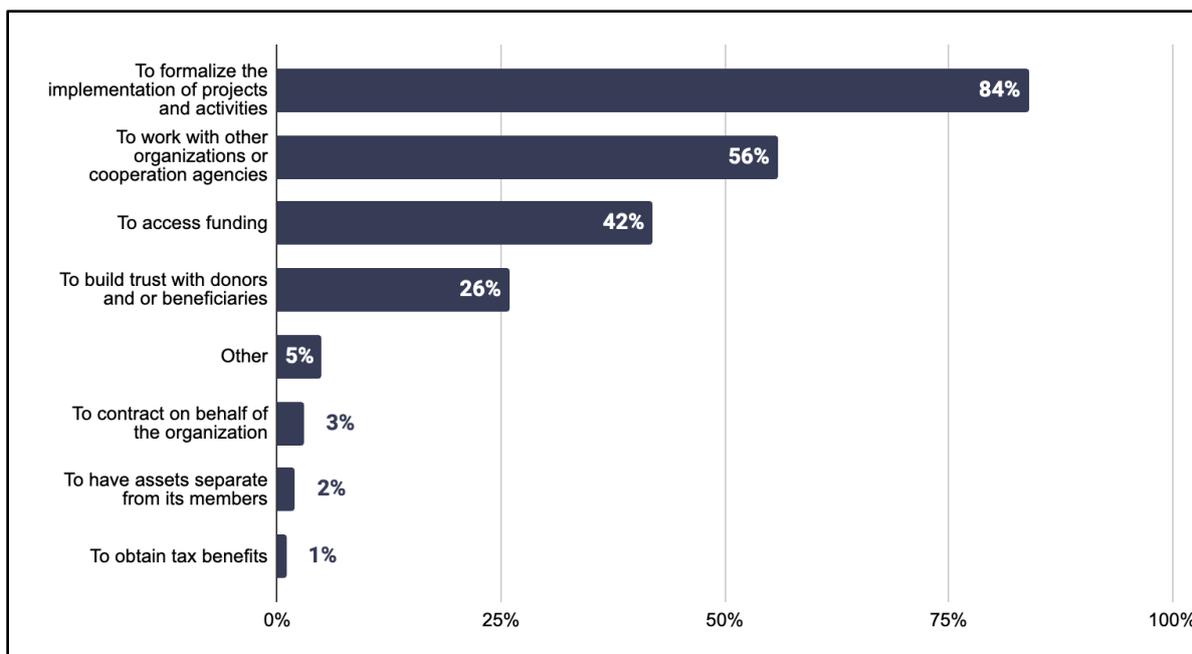
Figure 9. Public entity where CSOs are registered



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

The primary reason for obtaining legal status is to formalize their activities as a social organization, followed by the need to collaborate with cooperation agencies and secure resources. Having a formally established organization is the primary motivation for engaging in civil society work, which aligns logically with its objectives. However, access to resources is also a critical factor, as one out of every four emerging organizations indicated that they obtained legal status to gain access to funding opportunities.

Figure 10. Reasons for obtaining legal status



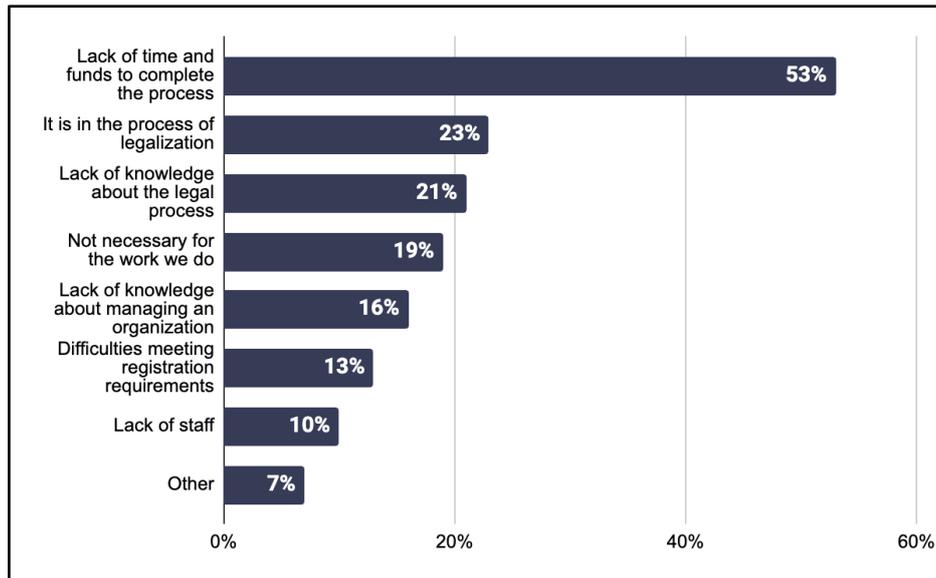
Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

There is another group of organizations that choose not to obtain legal status, representing 41% of the emerging organizations surveyed. The majority of unregistered organizations identify as collectives (40%), followed by the category "other" (29%), which includes those who consider themselves foundations, observatories, initiatives, among others. In third place is the "group" option with 23%.

The reasons for not acquiring legal status are varied, but the most notable is the lack of time and resources to complete the legal process required to establish an organization (53%). Additionally, 23% of organizations are in the process of legalization, and 19% mention that legal status is not necessary for their work. Workshops revealed that they can carry out their work through volunteering or individual consultancies, which are simpler processes compared to the requirements for legal status. About 17% of organizations are unfamiliar with the legal process.

This is not new since studies on emerging organizations in Latin America such as Salamon & Anheier (1996) already mentioned that many CSOs in the region operate in contexts of limited resources, where teams are more focused on direct action than on institutional formalization.

Figure 11. Reasons for not obtaining legal status



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

## Exploring the motivations, challenges, and opportunities for impact of Emerging CSOs

The rise of emerging CSOs in Ecuador, with approximately 6,000 newly registered organizations and a significant, unquantified number of non-registered organizations, is evidence of citizens' interest in taking responsibility for their role in society and addressing problems that have not been resolved through public administration. Over the past five years, a growing number of CSOs have been established to address systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, corruption, and human rights, especially for vulnerable groups. The following analysis explores the key drivers behind the formation and growth of these emerging CSOs in Ecuador, referred to in the study as emerging CSOs, including their motivations, challenges, and regional dynamics that shape their development.

### Motivations of emerging CSOs

Emerging CSOs in Ecuador are driven by a variety of motivations. One of the primary drivers is the need to address social, environmental, and economic inequalities present in Ecuador, including recent and ongoing events such as political instability and the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations in regions like Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio, for example, have risen to advocate for the rights of Indigenous communities, support social justice efforts, and engage in environmental protection initiatives, while also addressing insecurity and violence, as well as the challenges of human mobility.

Additionally, youth participation and leadership have become significant motivations, especially in cities like Quito and Cuenca, where young people are creating platforms to amplify their voices in areas such as mental health, education, and political advocacy, aiming to be an alternative voice to that of traditional or consolidated CSOs. These organizations reflect the desire to bring about social change and to promote new leadership and governance models that better represent the diverse voices of Ecuadorian society.

## Key challenges of emerging CSOs

Despite their importance, emerging CSOs face a range of barriers and challenges that limit their growth and effectiveness. One of the most significant challenges is the complex and costly legal framework for obtaining formal recognition. The bureaucratic processes and high financial costs required to register an organization discourage many from seeking formalization, especially those in remote areas like Puyo and Lago Agrio, where in some cases they must travel to Quito to obtain legal status. As a result, numerous CSOs operate informally (non-registered CSOs), which restricts their ability to access funding, participate in national and international networks, and engage in formal advocacy efforts.

Funding constraints also pose a major obstacle. Most emerging CSOs, both registered and non-registered, lack the financial resources needed to sustain their operations and scale their impact. In competitive environments like Quito and Guayaquil, newer organizations struggle to secure funding as they compete with well-established CSOs that have more robust networks and technical capacities, as well as significantly larger funding sources.

Political and institutional barriers further complicate the landscape for CSOs in Ecuador. The political dynamics, particularly in smaller cities where local authorities hold significant power, create additional challenges for organizations focused on citizen participation, and environmental and human rights advocacy. For example, CSOs in Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas report difficulties in establishing collaborations with local authorities due to the influence of political and economic interests linked to extractive activities. This dynamic undermines their ability to advocate effectively and limits their participation in local governance processes. Moreover, the lack of digital and technical capacity among most emerging CSOs hinders their ability to expand their outreach, improve project management, and engage with stakeholders through modern communication channels.

## Local factors

The landscape of emerging CSOs in Ecuador varies significantly across regions, shaped by local socio-economic conditions, political environments, capacity building, and community needs. In Quito, for instance, emerging organizations benefit from proximity to academic institutions and international donors, making the city a hub for innovation and international collaboration. These organizations focus on governance, youth participation, and human rights, leveraging their access to resources and technical support to push the boundaries of social impact. Conversely, in Guayaquil, the CSO landscape is more commercially oriented, with strong ties to the private sector. Here, new organizations often arise from citizen activism or political movements, and their agendas prioritize transparency, accountability, and urban issues such as safe mobility.

In regions like Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio, grassroots activism is the primary driver behind the formation of new CSOs. These organizations operate under challenging conditions, often without formal legal status or consistent funding, which highlights their resilience and

commitment to addressing critical social and environmental issues. Similarly, in cities like Cuenca and Puyo, CSOs show high potential for youth and Indigenous leadership but face constraints in terms of technical capacity and limited access to sustainable financial resources. This regional diversity underscores the varying roles and impacts of CSOs across the country and the need for tailored support to strengthen their capacity and sustainability.

### **Opportunities for emerging CSOs**

Emerging CSOs in Ecuador have several opportunities to overcome their challenges and enhance their sustainability. One significant opportunity lies in developing capacity-building initiatives focused on project development, digital engagement, and financial management. Strengthening the technical skills of CSO leaders can enable them to manage their projects more effectively and engage stakeholders in a more impactful way.

Another key opportunity is enhancing their digital presence. By increasing their use of digital platforms for outreach, advocacy, and project management, emerging CSOs can significantly expand their visibility and influence, particularly in remote areas where traditional forms of engagement may be limited.

Additionally, fostering strategic alliances with national and international organizations, private sector companies, and academic institutions presents an opportunity for CSOs to build sustainable networks and partnerships. These collaborations can provide essential support, resources, and expertise that will enable CSOs to scale their impact.

Finally, simplifying the registration processes and addressing legal and bureaucratic barriers can open up opportunities for more emerging CSOs to formalize their status. This would improve their operational capacity, access to funding, and participation in national and international networks, ultimately allowing them to better fulfill their missions and strengthen their roles in society.

### **3.3 Factors reducing political participation and democratic action**

Emerging CSOs in Ecuador are confronted with a complex environment characterized by multiple economic, political, and security challenges. These factors significantly influence their ability to operate, mobilize, and participate in the public sphere. While economic and financial constraints are identified as the most critical issues affecting CSOs, cultural, social, and political factors further complicate their work and limit their impact on society. Additionally, the lack of adequate funding, legal barriers, and political instability create an environment where organizations struggle to sustain their operations and contribute to democratic processes. The following sections provide an overview of the current context for emerging CSOs, highlighting the most relevant factors that shape their work and outlining the barriers they face in their efforts to generate meaningful social change.

## Relevant factors in the current context for emerging CSOs

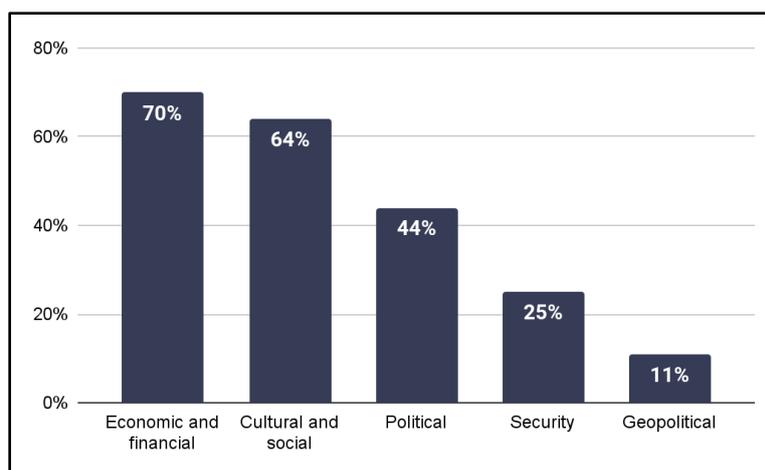
Emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador are influenced by various factors that shape their participation in the public space. The most relevant factors affecting these organizations are economic and financial (70%), cultural and social (64%), and political (44%). Economic and financial constraints are particularly challenging, as they limit the ability of CSOs to execute projects, maintain a consolidated team, and access external funding sources. This financial limitation restricts their capacity to influence public policy and establish strategic alliances, ultimately hindering their democratic action (Edwards, 2014).

The factors influencing the work of emerging civil society in Ecuador are shared across all regions. Both the workshops and the surveys indicate that economic and financial aspects are primary considerations for the sustainability of organizations, and this situation does not significantly differ in any specific city. Political factors are also common among most organizations in various territories, regardless of the nature of their work. In particular, the relationship with local governments is complex, as it often hinges on the willingness and openness of the current authorities, and there is noticeable polarization.

Nevertheless, cultural and social factors vary significantly across different locales. For instance, in Ibarra, participants in the local workshop emphasized that, in a province as diverse as Imbabura, full participation from all sectors has not been achieved. Only a defined group is engaged, and barriers such as language, customs, and traditions remain unaddressed, preventing effective involvement of the 11 nationalities residing in the area. In border regions like Esmeraldas or Sucumbíos, discussions highlighted the language barriers and the skills needed to present initiatives to international cooperation. Proposing projects in English in a country where few people speak the language is seen as exclusive. Similarly, in areas lacking a strong presence of academic institutions or more mature social organizations, weaknesses are apparent when compared to larger cities.

Cultural and social factors include a lack of legitimacy and stigmatization, especially for organizations working on human rights and gender equality. This undermines their participation in political processes, reduces their influence, and complicates collaboration with key actors (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Political factors, such as uncertainty and corruption, also present significant obstacles. Political crises, staff turnover in public institutions, and the absence of governmental support contribute to an environment where political participation is limited, and democratic agendas are difficult to articulate (Diamond, 2015).

*Figure 12: Relevant factors in the current context for emerging CSOs*



Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

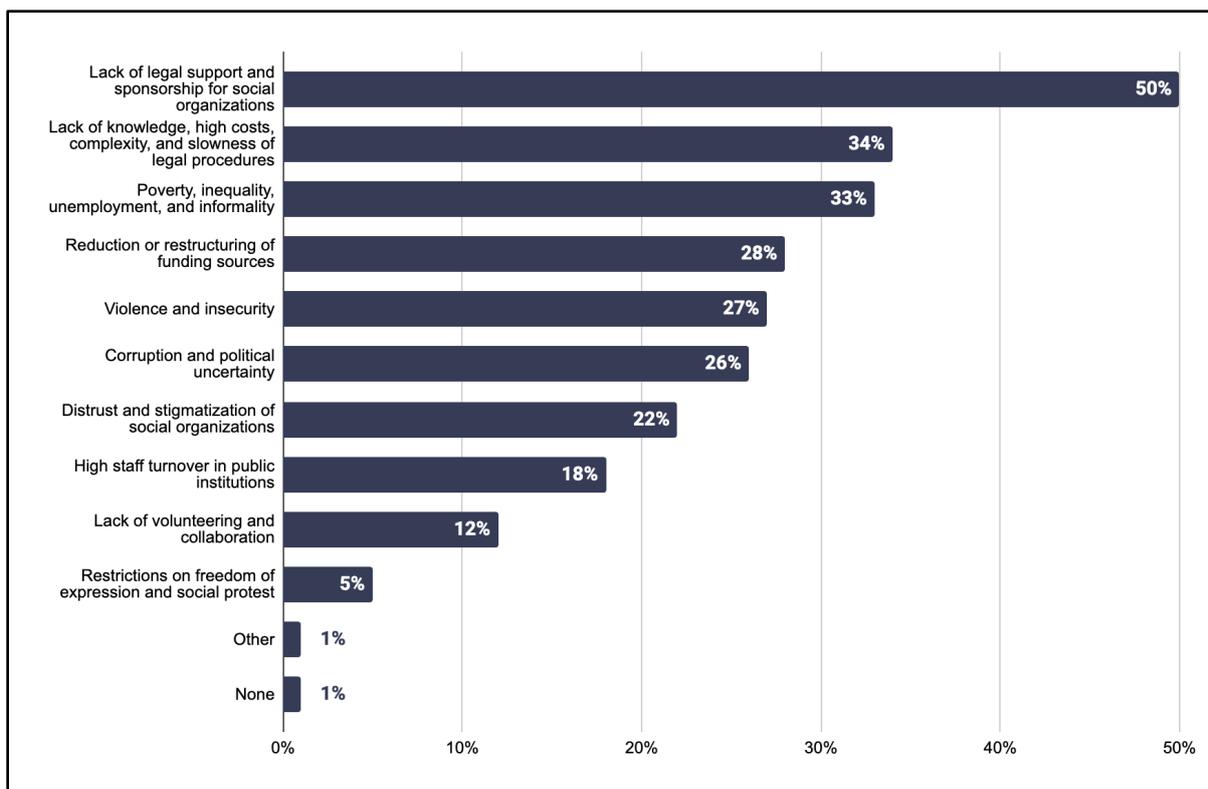
### Aspects affecting the work of emerging CSOs

Several barriers further complicate the work of emerging CSOs. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the organizations indicated that legal barriers, such as the complexity, high costs, and slow pace of legal procedures, prevent them from formalizing their status (Anheier, 2014). This hinders their ability to access funding and participate in decision-making spaces, which limits their legitimacy and sustainability. Additionally, twenty-six percent (26%) of CSOs identified political uncertainty and corruption as significant obstacles. These issues weaken trust in public institutions, making it difficult for CSOs to be heard and respected in the public arena (Fukuyama, 2004).

Economic constraints, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and the reduction of funding sources, directly impact CSOs' operational capacity, with 33% of the organizations reporting that these issues significantly affect their work (Tandon & Mohanty, 2003). These structural challenges not only limit access to financial resources but also reduce the ability of CSOs to mobilize their social base. Insecurity and violence, although not as prominently reported, still pose a threat, with 27% of CSOs indicating that these factors complicate their operations, particularly in cities like Guayaquil, where it ranks as a critical factor affecting CSO work (Pearce, 2010).

It is important to highlight that the need to strengthen internal management within organizations is considered even more crucial than external factors such as corruption, violence, poverty, or political barriers. Although these external issues are recognized as significant challenges, the primary barrier hindering the development of emerging CSOs is the lack of legal, financial, and technical support necessary to formalize their work and establish a solid organizational presence.

Figure 13: Main situational factors affecting emerging CSOs work



Source: Emerging CSO Survey, 2024

In general, the most critical factor for emerging CSOs, whether internal or external, contextual or structural, is access to funding and the overall economic environment. Although passion and motivation are the primary drivers for individuals to engage in civil society work, the need to secure financial resources is both urgent and undeniable. Just like any other sector of the economy, the organized civil society sector must generate economic and job stability for those involved in these organizations. Additionally, it is essential to recognize the importance of obtaining adequate funding to implement projects that have a greater impact.

## Security

Emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador face a range of challenges influenced by the country's evolving security situation. This report expands on earlier findings by incorporating insights from three key variables—current context, environmental factors, and security-specific challenges. The analysis is based on survey data and qualitative input from workshops, providing a comprehensive overview of the challenges that impact the ability of CSOs to work effectively. While many organizations identified these security factors as critical, some CSOs did not perceive them as major threats. This variation may be due to differences in geographic location, the nature of their work, or the degree of exposure to violent environments.

### Security Concerns as a Contextual Challenge

Security is identified as one of the critical contextual factors affecting CSOs in Ecuador. Despite being ranked lower than issues like economic and financial concerns, security is a significant

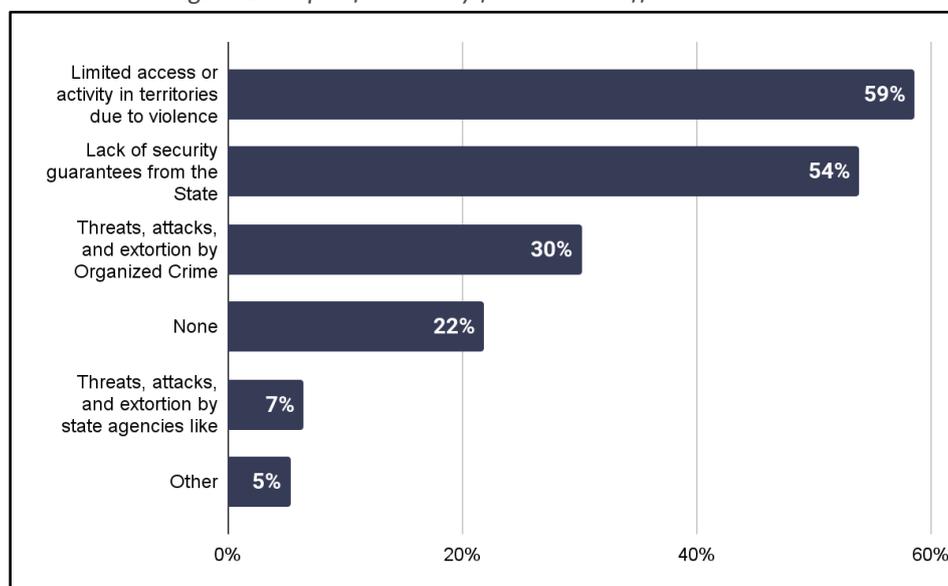
concern, especially in major urban centers. Survey responses indicated that **43 out of 169** respondents (25%) selected security as one of the top three factors influencing their work. This percentage rises in specific urban centers, reaching 50% in cities like Quito, Guayaquil, Esmeraldas, Ibarra, and Cuenca.

### Security as an Environmental Factor

The survey reveals that **violence and insecurity** are among the four main environmental factors affecting CSO operations, with **46 out of 169** organizations identifying it as a critical barrier. This places security concerns in a context similar to **corruption and political uncertainty** (44 responses) and highlights its importance alongside other prominent issues like **poverty, inequality, unemployment, and informality** (56 responses). This insight confirms that insecurity, coupled with economic challenges and a lack of support, significantly influences the operational environment of CSOs.

Considering specific security factors, the survey reveals that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador face significant security-specific challenges that hinder their ability to operate effectively. One of the main issues is limited access to territories, with 33% of organizations citing difficulties executing activities due to violence, which restricts their reach, especially in vulnerable communities. Additionally, 31% of respondents highlighted the lack of security guarantees from the state as a major barrier, leaving CSOs exposed to threats, particularly in areas where organized crime is prevalent. Furthermore, 17% of organizations reported experiencing threats, attacks, and extortion by organized crime groups, complicating their work in regions with minimal state presence. A smaller but notable challenge is the threat posed by state agencies, including the Armed Forces and National Police, with 4% of organizations indicating such threats, reflecting a sense of mistrust towards state entities and viewing them as adversaries rather than protectors. These challenges collectively create a precarious environment for CSOs, undermining their operational effectiveness and sustainability.

Figure 14 . Specific security factors that affect their work



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

The analysis of the workshops shows that security is a crucial and cross-cutting challenge for emerging civil society organizations in Ecuador. Insecurity and violence are particularly highlighted in contexts such as Esmeraldas, Lago Agrio, and Guayaquil, where the presence of armed groups and the normalization of violence affect the operational capacity of organizations and limit their activities. These security challenges are also influenced by economic and political factors, such as the lack of funding and institutional support, which exacerbate the vulnerability of both communities and organizations in their work environment.

Overall, insecurity impacts not only project implementation but also collaboration with local actors and the ability to ensure a safe environment for community members. This context underscores the need for strategies that combine institutional strengthening with security risk management, so that organizations can operate effectively and safely, even in environments marked by violence and political instability.

### **3.4 Contributions and innovative advocacy strategies**

#### **Collaboration with other sectors**

Emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador exhibit a strong pattern of collaboration with various governmental bodies, particularly at the local level. According to the survey data, 35% of these organizations work closely with local governments, such as Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GADs), while 17% engage with the central government, including ministries and public companies. This demonstrates that CSOs are significant contributors to policy implementation, acting as crucial intermediaries between the government and the communities they serve.

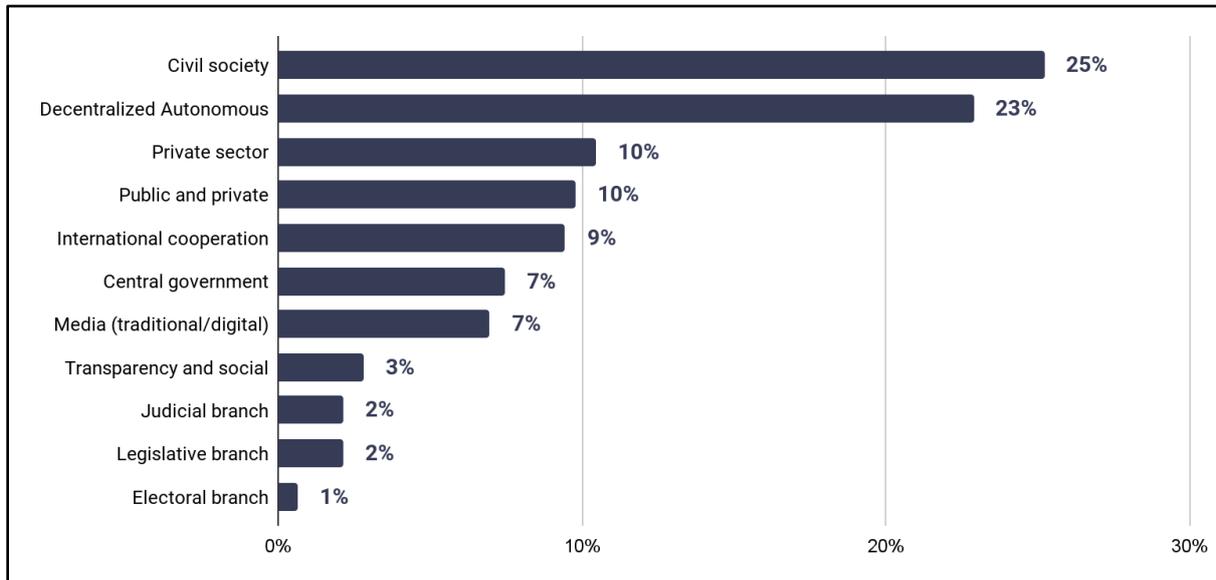
The focus on local government collaboration is particularly valuable, as it aligns with democratic principles of participation and community empowerment. By working at the grassroots level, CSOs are well-positioned to advocate for and implement community-specific solutions, addressing local needs through policy influence. Furthermore, this close interaction with GADs enables CSOs to act as bridges between citizens and decision-makers, ensuring that the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups are heard.

Despite this, there remains a notable absence of collaboration with other branches of government. The survey data shows only minimal engagement with the judicial (2.16%), legislative (2.16%), and electoral (0.66%) branches, and limited interaction with transparency and social control institutions (2.82%). This gap presents an opportunity for CSOs to broaden their scope of influence by advocating within these governance structures. By expanding their advocacy strategies, CSOs can potentially enhance their impact on systemic issues, fostering more comprehensive policy changes that require multi-stakeholder involvement across all governmental branches.

Beyond government, CSOs also collaborate with other sectors, such as civil society (25.21%), the private sector (10.45%), academia (9.78%), and international cooperation organizations (9.45%). These partnerships further strengthen their ability to address complex, multi-faceted

challenges. By diversifying their alliances, CSOs can leverage expertise, resources, and networks from a variety of fields, creating more holistic and sustainable solutions to the issues they tackle.

Figure 15. Collaboration with different sectors

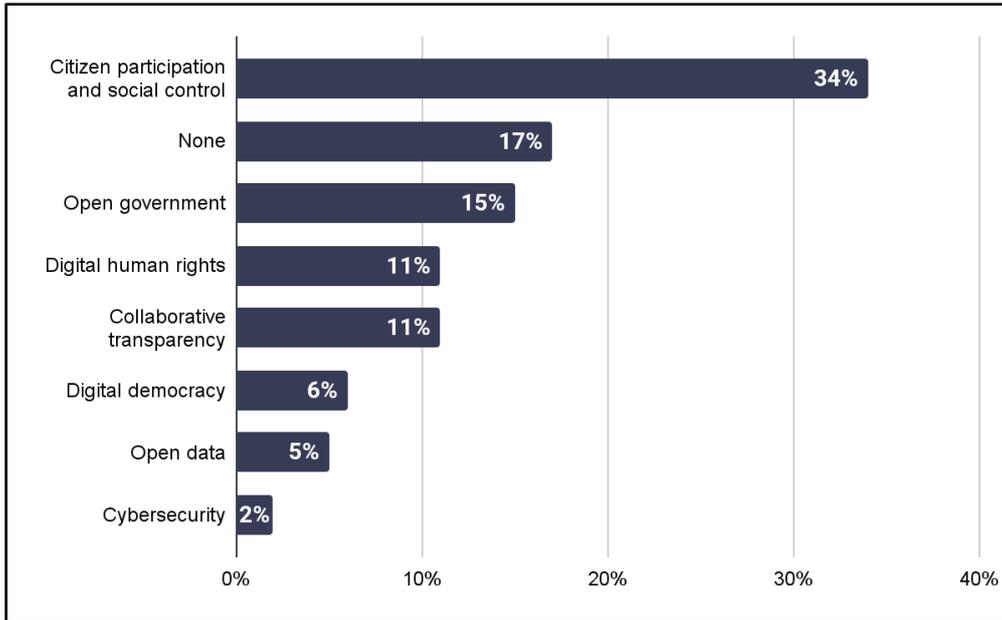


Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

### Innovative Advocacy Strategies in Governance

Civil society organizations have been instrumental in fostering citizen participation and governance, particularly at the local level. Many CSOs have focused on activating local participation mechanisms such as social oversight committees and participatory budgeting. These mechanisms empower citizens to have a direct voice in governance processes, thereby improving transparency and fostering public accountability. Besides, a significant portion of CSOs also engage with open government spaces, using these platforms to promote more inclusive decision-making processes. By participating in open government initiatives, these organizations are pushing for greater transparency and citizen involvement in governance, particularly in sectors like environmental protection, health, and social services. Despite these promising trends, it is worth noting that a substantial number of CSOs do not engage in governance-related initiatives. This lack of engagement may be due to limited resources, inadequate capacity, or structural barriers such as the absence of legal support, which was identified as a key obstacle by many organizations.

Figure 16. CSO governance related work

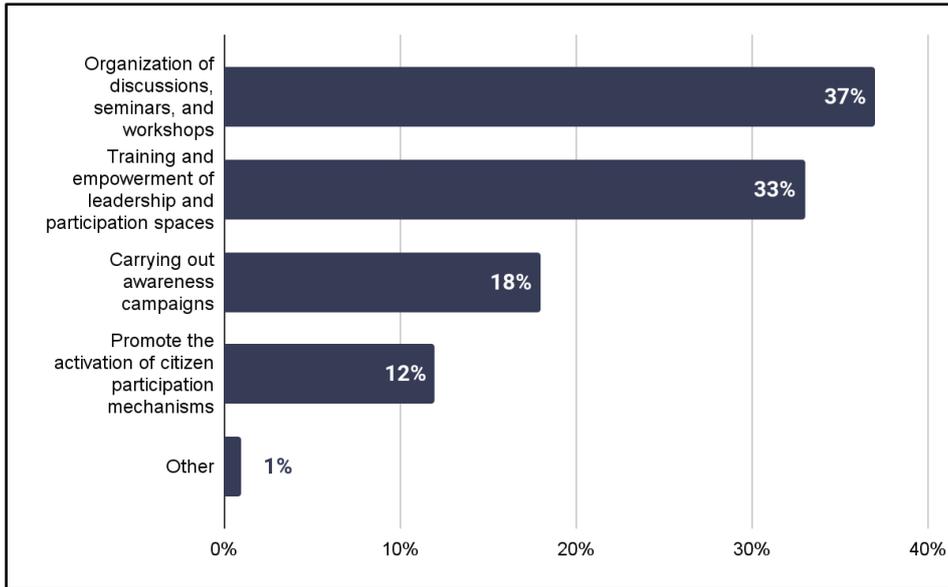


Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

### Citizen Participation Initiatives

Citizen participation is a central element of CSO work in Ecuador. The analysis of activities shows that the most common initiatives involve organizing workshops, seminars, and capacity-building programs aimed at fostering leadership within communities. Such activities are crucial in empowering citizens and fostering a culture of civic engagement, ensuring that communities are better equipped to participate in governance processes actively. Interestingly, only a small number of organizations use digital platforms or social media to engage the public in democratic processes. The low adoption rate of digital tools for advocacy and mobilization suggests that while traditional methods of engagement are well-established, there is significant room for growth in the digital advocacy space. Expanding digital engagement could help CSOs connect with younger audiences and amplify their advocacy efforts, ultimately contributing to more dynamic and inclusive citizen participation. This issue is further analyzed in the following section.

Figure 17. CSO promotion of citizen engagement



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

### Engagement in Democracy and Leadership Demographics

The age distribution of CSO representatives highlights a strong presence of experienced middle-aged individuals, with a majority between 30 and 50 years old. This demographic suggests stability in leadership but also points to the need for involving younger leaders to ensure the sustainability of advocacy efforts. Engaging younger members in leadership roles could help foster a culture of innovation within CSOs and provide fresh perspectives on persistent challenges.

The leadership demographic data also shows significant female representation, with 54.2% of representatives being women, indicating progress towards gender equality. Additionally, the involvement of non-binary individuals and members of marginalized communities (e.g., Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities) in decision-making positions reflects an effort to build diverse and inclusive leadership teams, which can contribute to more effective, context-sensitive advocacy. However, this is still a challenge for LGBTQI+ individuals.

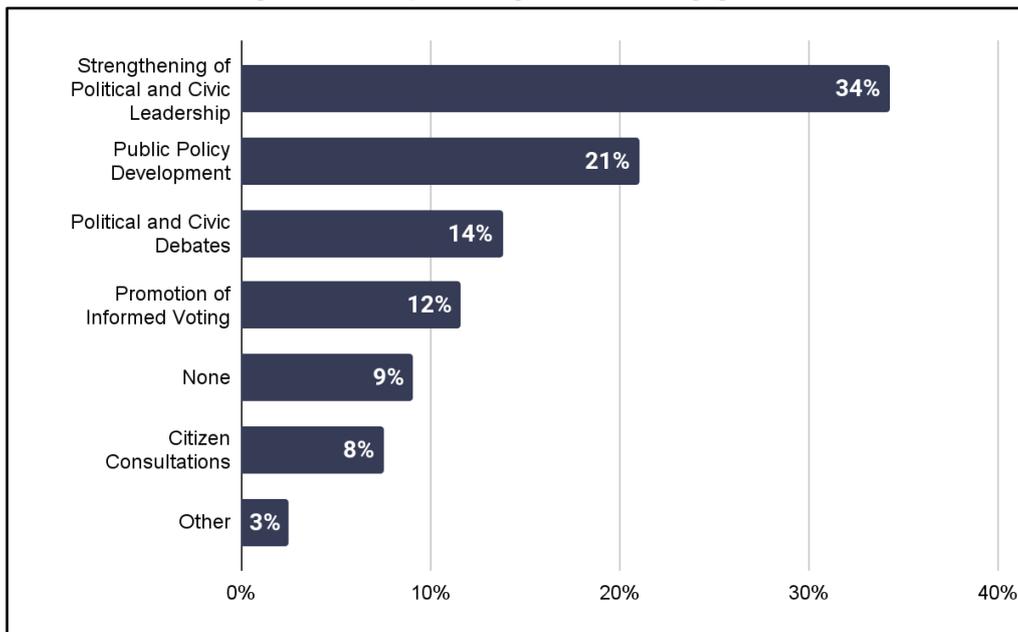
### Democratic Processes Promoted by Emerging

The data shows that strengthening political and civic leadership is the most common democratic strategy among Ecuadorian CSOs, with an engagement rate of 34.28%. This emphasis reflects a clear priority for many organizations to build local capacity and empower individuals to lead. Such a focus on leadership is crucial for the long-term sustainability of democratic engagement, ensuring that community members are well-prepared to take on active roles in local governance and advocacy efforts.

In contrast, public policy development (21.07%) and political and civic debates (13.84%) see more moderate levels of engagement, suggesting that while CSOs recognize the importance of influencing governance and fostering public discussion, these activities are less prioritized compared to leadership development. Activities like promotion of informed voting (11.64%) and citizen consultations (7.55%) are even less engaged, pointing to a significant gap in voter

education and direct public involvement. Enhancing these aspects could contribute to more informed citizenry and a stronger connection between public opinion and policy-making.

Figure 18. CSO promoting democratic engagement



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

### CSOs and elections

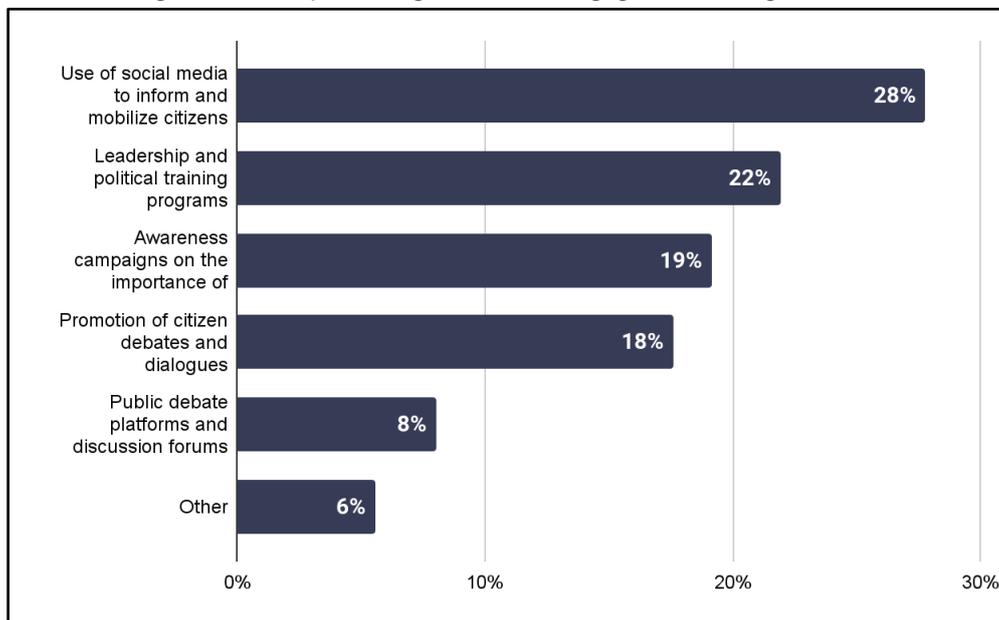
The data highlights a variety of approaches employed by emerging CSOs in Ecuador to foster citizen participation in democratic processes, such as elections, public consultations, and debates. Notably, **27.78%** of these organizations leverage **social media** as a key tool for informing and mobilizing citizens. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow CSOs to reach broader audiences efficiently, especially younger populations, providing crucial information about electoral processes and promoting civic engagement. This widespread use of social media underscores the digital shift in CSO strategies, which enables them to engage communities in a cost-effective manner, often supplementing other outreach activities.

In addition to digital efforts, **21.91%** of CSOs offer **leadership and political training programs** aimed at equipping citizens with the skills necessary to actively participate in democratic systems. These programs not only foster political literacy but also help develop local leadership, strengthening grassroots participation in governance. Moreover, **19.14%** of CSOs focus on **awareness campaigns** that emphasize the importance of informed voting. Through these campaigns, CSOs seek to ensure that citizens make knowledgeable decisions at the polls, engaging with them directly via in-person assemblies or educational materials disseminated through various media channels.

Despite these efforts, **public debate platforms and discussion forums** are less frequently employed, with only **8.02%** of CSOs facilitating such spaces. While some organizations do promote **citizen debates and dialogues** (17.59%), there is a clear opportunity to expand structured, formal platforms for public discourse. Providing more forums for community members to exchange ideas and engage in democratic debates could strengthen public

involvement in governance and political decision-making. Additionally, a small percentage (5.56%) of CSOs employ **alternative methods** to encourage civic engagement, such as empowering marginalized groups, advocating for migrant rights, or organizing educational workshops. These varied approaches reflect the adaptability of CSOs in addressing the specific needs of their communities, but they also highlight areas where further support and development could enhance their overall impact on democratic participation.

Figure 19. CSO promoting democratic engagement during elections



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

## Gender and Social Inclusion

Diversity is a critical factor in the sustainability of CSOs. Organizations with diverse leadership, including women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and members of marginalized communities, are better equipped to understand and address the unique needs of various population groups. The commitment to diversity not only enhances the representativeness of these organizations but also ensures that their initiatives are more inclusive and equitable.

While there is still room for improvement—such as increasing the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals and expanding leadership opportunities for younger members—existing efforts provide a strong foundation for building sustainable, impactful CSOs that truly reflect the communities they serve.

The participation of women in civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador reflects the traditional gendered division of labor, where women are assigned caregiving roles both in private and public spheres. In CSOs, women are prominent in areas such as women's rights, support for vulnerable populations, and social justice, extending their caregiving roles from the household to the public and community space. Despite lower reports of workplace gender violence compared to male-dominated sectors like industry or politics (Peña, 2020), structural inequalities persist, particularly through sectoral and horizontal segregation. Women are

overrepresented in low-paid sectors, such as social organizations, where their socially valuable work is less remunerated compared to male-dominated sectors, aligning with the feminization of labor.

According to ECLAC (2018) and Peña (2020), while women play a crucial role in CSOs, they face precarious working conditions and a significant wage gap. The sexual division of labor remains a structural barrier that undermines women's autonomy, manifesting not only in homes but also in the labor market. Paid care work links unpaid domestic work with paid employment, often seen as an extension of women's household duties and undervalued as requiring low qualifications. As a result, these jobs, mostly held by women, are associated with lower wages (ILO, 2018).

Women are also underrepresented in leadership positions. Only 2.8% of women in the care sector hold leadership roles compared to 4.3% of men. This occupational segmentation affects wages, with large wage gaps between men and women, particularly among high-level professionals and directors (ECLAC 2018, 153). Even when men and women have the same qualifications, they do not have the same opportunities to access higher wages aligned with their professional profiles.

The ILO (2018) reports that women in female-dominated sectors tend to earn less than men, even when they perform equal or higher responsibility roles. This wage gap reflects the undervaluation of care and human rights work, which, although essential, is not seen as highly profitable. Women's participation in CSOs is not only a commitment to social causes but also a response to exclusion from other decision-making spaces. Despite their predominance in the sector, many women hold subordinate positions and face structural barriers to leadership roles.

While CSOs in Ecuador may offer a relatively safer environment regarding workplace gender violence, they remain marked by economic and structural inequalities. The large presence of women in these organizations highlights the need to transform labor relations, redistribute caregiving responsibilities equitably, and economically value the social work they perform.

### **Empowerment of women in emerging CSOs**

The empowerment of women in emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador is a crucial factor in building a more inclusive, just, and sustainable environment. These female leaders are not only transforming their communities by addressing social, environmental, and human rights issues, but they are also strengthening the social fabric through collaborative approaches and an integrated gender perspective. However, the path toward full and equitable female participation in these organizations remains fraught with challenges.

Women in emerging CSOs are redefining leadership with a focus on inclusion and social justice. Their presence in leadership roles, especially in vulnerable areas like Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio, has allowed social movements to adopt a more inclusive defense of human rights, bringing a unique sensitivity to the issues faced by local communities. Their leadership not only benefits female representation but also positively impacts the broader community by promoting structural changes that strengthen social cohesion. In Ecuador, female leadership in

emerging CSOs also focuses on sustainability and rights advocacy, tackling diverse issues in different regions.

In Esmeraldas, for instance, women lead initiatives against gender-based violence and create safe spaces for female sex workers. Through feminist coalitions and community collectives, they address structural issues such as racial discrimination and social exclusion, establishing themselves as influential voices in the area. In Lago Agrio, in the Amazon, women leaders of CSOs are at the forefront of defending the rights of Indigenous communities and environmental protection. Their leadership is crucial in resisting resource exploitation and promoting sustainable conservation in an environment threatened by the extractive industry.

In the central Amazonian city of Puyo, organizations led primarily by women, focus on gender equity and social justice while building strategic alliances that strengthen their impact on human rights advocacy and sustainable development. In Quito, some organizations are led by women who drive projects on sustainable mobility and road safety, integrating a gender perspective in urban planning and promoting equitable access to mobility.

Despite these advances, women in leadership roles in emerging CSOs face significant challenges that limit their impact and sustainability. Resource scarcity, for example, hinders many CSOs. A lack of funding and limited access to technical resources makes it difficult to consolidate female leadership in many organizations, an issue particularly pronounced in urban areas like Quito and Guayaquil, where competition for funds is high. In addition, traditional hierarchical structures in many organizations and a lack of gender equity in key decision-making roles restrict women's access to significant leadership positions.

Many women who assume leadership roles in CSOs must balance these responsibilities with unpaid work at home, limiting their availability to participate actively and consistently in these organizations. Furthermore, the gender gap in access to training opportunities in management, fundraising, and digital communication reduces the potential growth and scalability of their projects and initiatives.

To overcome these obstacles and strengthen female empowerment within emerging CSOs in Ecuador, it is essential to implement several strategies aimed at consolidating and expanding their influence. Specialized training programs in organizational management, fundraising, and digital skills, specifically tailored for female leaders, can improve their strategic decision-making capabilities and increase the visibility of their projects. Building collaborative networks among CSOs at regional and national levels will facilitate knowledge exchange and the establishment of alliances that expand the reach of their initiatives. These networks can include female leaders from various regions facing common challenges, creating mentorship spaces and mutual support.

Strengthening alliances with international bodies, such as cooperation agencies and universities, can increase access to funding and technical resources. These alliances should promote mentorship programs that connect emerging female leaders with established figures in the CSO field, helping them develop skills and build a solid support network. Furthermore, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of training and governance within CSOs is

essential to creating a more inclusive environment, actively valuing women’s leadership and fostering structural changes that drive long-term female participation.

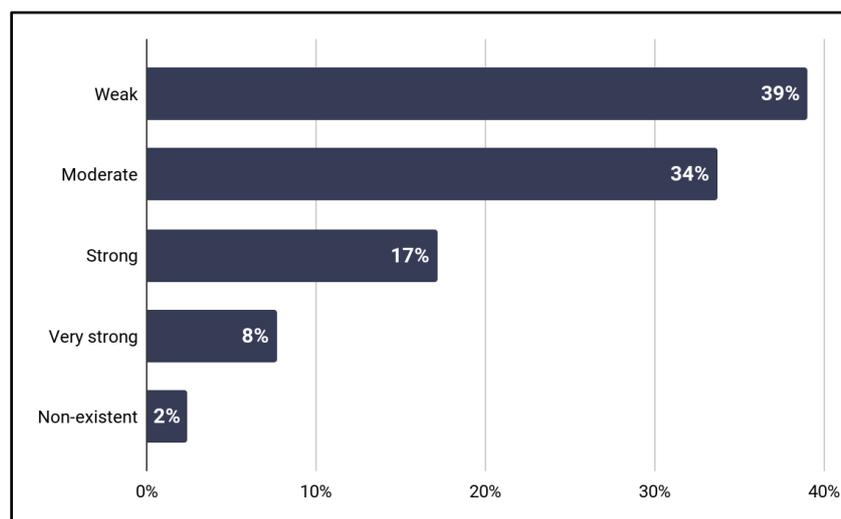
### 3.5 Digital Engagement Strategies of Emerging CSOs

Emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador are leveraging digital spaces to pursue their goals and engage with audiences. The use of digital platforms is critical for amplifying voices, reaching broader communities, and enhancing the effectiveness of initiatives. This report expands on the analysis by integrating a gender perspective and geographic considerations into three aspects: digital presence, social media usage, and digital tools adoption among emerging CSOs in Ecuador.

#### Digital presence

The digital presence of emerging CSOs in Ecuador varies widely, with significant disparities in the ability to establish and maintain an online presence. Survey data indicates that **39% of emerging CSOs have a weak digital presence**, characterized by sporadic activity on social media, while **33% maintain a moderate presence** with occasionally active websites or social media platforms. Only **17% have a strong presence**, actively using websites and social media, and **8% report a very strong presence**, which includes active websites, social media, and electronic newsletters or document sharing.

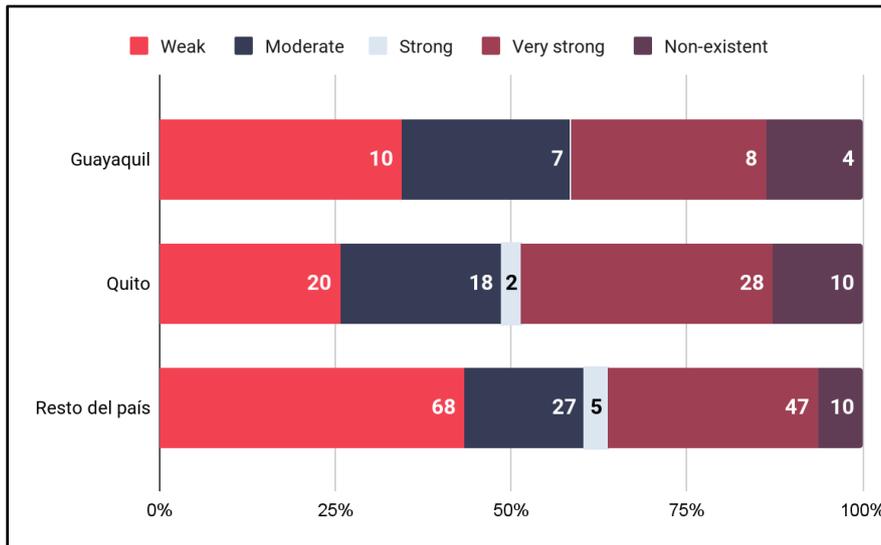
Figure 20. Emerging CSOs digital presence



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

The analysis reveals that CSOs led by female representatives are more likely to report a weaker digital presence compared to those led by male representatives, indicating potential gender-based disparities in access to digital resources and skills. Additionally, geographic disparities were evident, with organizations in Quito demonstrating higher levels of digital engagement, whereas those in other regions, particularly rural areas, reported weaker or non-existent digital presence. This highlights the importance of targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide between urban centers and less connected regions.

Figure 21. Emerging CSOs digital presence by location



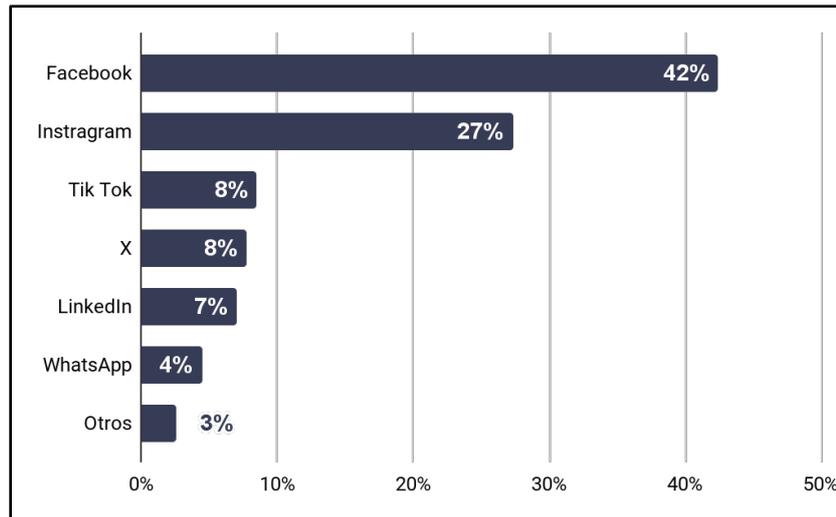
Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

## Social Media Use

Social media platforms play a key role in the digital strategies of emerging CSOs in Ecuador. Facebook is the most commonly used platform, with 42% of organizations indicating it as their primary tool for audience engagement. Instagram follows, used by 27% of CSOs, while other platforms like TikTok, Twitter (X), and LinkedIn have a smaller but notable presence among CSOs. The data shows that CSOs outside of Quito and Guayaquil tend to favor Facebook, possibly due to its wide reach and familiarity among different demographics.

The usage of platforms like TikTok and Twitter is limited, which may reflect resource constraints or a lack of familiarity with these newer platforms. Nevertheless, some organizations are adopting diverse social media strategies, leveraging different platforms to reach varied audiences, including younger demographics through Instagram and TikTok. There is potential for expanding the use of LinkedIn and other professional platforms to increase networking and advocacy impact.

Figure 22. Emerging CSOs use of social media



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

Quito and Guayaquil show a relatively balanced social media presence, with many organizations in these cities adopting both Facebook and Instagram. Quito leads in Instagram use, with 20 CSOs actively engaging on the platform, while Guayaquil follows closely, suggesting that urban areas are more inclined to diversify their social media presence beyond just Facebook. In contrast, CSOs in rural areas are more dependent on Facebook, possibly due to its familiarity and broad user base, with 83 CSOs in rural areas reporting the use of Facebook compared to fewer organizations using Instagram or other platforms. The limited adoption of newer platforms in rural areas indicates potential barriers such as a lack of training in multimedia content creation or concerns about digital literacy among their audience.

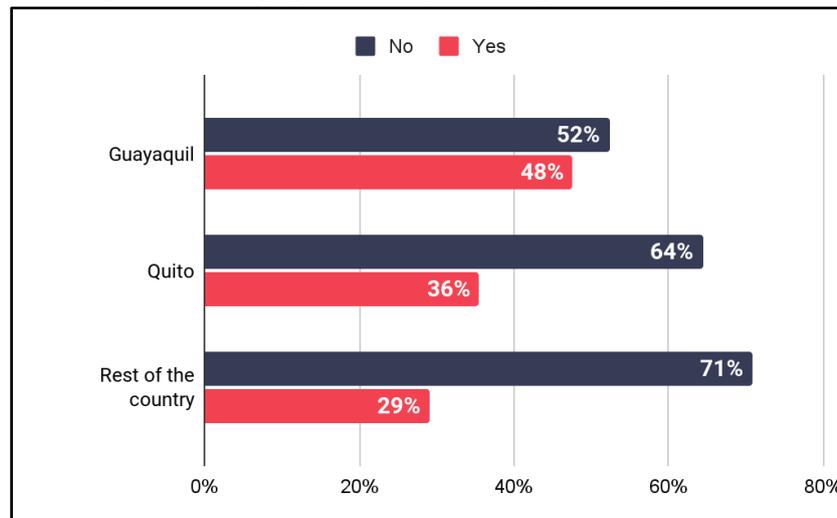
## Digital Tools Adoption

The use of digital tools is an essential aspect of digital transformation for emerging CSOs in Ecuador. 33% of emerging CSOs reported using new digital methodologies, such as project management tools and digital collaboration platforms. In other words, only 3 out of 10 CSOs are adopting digital tools. This data suggests that while there is interest in digital innovation, there is still significant room for improvement in digital tool adoption. When examining adoption rates based on organizational leadership, male-led CSOs were more likely to use digital tools compared to female-led ones, suggesting a gender gap in access to or familiarity with these technologies. To enhance digital engagement, capacity-building efforts should focus on improving digital literacy, especially among female-led organizations and those located in rural areas.

In urban centers such as Quito and Guayaquil, CSOs show higher rates of digital tool adoption compared to the rest of the country. In Quito, 47 CSOs reported not using digital tools, but 31 indicated that they do, reflecting a willingness to embrace technology where resources are available. In Guayaquil, the balance between those adopting digital tools and those not is more even, suggesting better access to resources and training compared to rural areas. In contrast, only 29% of CSOs in rural areas have adopted digital tools, indicating a significant digital divide.

Barriers such as insufficient infrastructure, lack of digital skills, and financial limitations impede the adoption of digital tools in these regions, resulting in struggles with efficiency, outreach, and operational capacity. This underscores the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives to bridge the gap.

Figure 23. Emerging CSOs adoption of digital tools by location



Source: Source: Emerging CSO Survey (2024)

During the workshops, emerging CSOs identified several aspects related to the adoption of technologies and the use of digital tools, as well as the broader digital space.

- **Challenges in the Use of Technology and Digital Tools:** Emerging CSOs in Ecuador face several challenges in effectively utilizing technology and digital tools. Limited access to digital tools and platforms is a significant barrier, with many organizations lacking the financial and technical resources needed to maintain these technologies. This limitation is reflected in statements indicating struggles with managing online tools and platforms, which restricts their ability to engage with communities meaningfully. Additionally, the knowledge and skill gaps within organizations pose a considerable challenge, as many CSOs struggle to learn and apply digital methodologies effectively. These challenges, rooted in insufficient infrastructure, funding, and capacity, prevent CSOs from fully integrating technology into their operations and realizing their full potential for community impact.
- **Opportunities in Leveraging Technology and Digital Space:** Despite the challenges, there are notable opportunities for emerging CSOs to leverage technology and digital tools for community engagement and cultural preservation. The creation and management of digital platforms present significant opportunities for expanding outreach and fostering community involvement. For instance, digital initiatives like the "Plataforma digital del kichwa" highlight the potential of technology to promote cultural heritage and language, showcasing the adaptability of digital tools for culturally responsive purposes. Furthermore, partnerships with local governments and institutions provide avenues for CSOs to gain support in building the infrastructure required for digital engagement. These opportunities underscore the importance of

digital space as a transformative tool that can enhance CSO outreach, efficiency, and cultural impact.

- **New Tools and Methodologies in Digital Communication:** The use of digital communication tools is becoming an integral part of CSOs' strategies to engage their communities and promote their causes. Many organizations are beginning to adopt digital platforms for educational outreach, which helps broaden the reach of their initiatives, particularly to younger demographics. Tools such as social media are also used to communicate with audiences, advertise events, and build community networks, thereby enhancing visibility and fostering active dialogue. However, the effective use of these tools requires skills in content creation and digital strategy, areas where many CSOs need further capacity-building support. Additionally, CSOs are exploring collaborative digital methods to engage with partners and involve communities in their projects. These new methodologies represent a growing shift towards embracing digital innovation, although targeted training and resource allocation are necessary to fully realize their potential.

# Conclusions

1. **Participation of CSOs in the research:** Participation of CSOs in this study was voluntary, with two primary spaces for engagement: the survey and local workshops. This approach encouraged active and motivated involvement, particularly from CSOs in regions outside major urban centers, reflecting their strong willingness to contribute insights and experiences. The collaborative nature of the research was well-received, with many organizations expressing a desire for more inclusive spaces for exchange that reach beyond the primary cities to foster stronger regional networks. A recurring suggestion from CSOs was the importance of "giving back" research findings and data to participating organizations. This practice would not only recognize their contributions but also provide valuable insights to inform their own advocacy and operational efforts. By integrating a feedback mechanism to share results, this research initiative could strengthen trust and reciprocity, enhancing CSO engagement and supporting their work in advancing democracy and social equity across diverse regions.
2. **Emerging Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as Key Drivers of Social Change:** Emerging CSOs in Ecuador have proven to be vital agents of change, particularly in addressing complex societal issues such as inequality, corruption, and the protection of marginalized groups. These organizations fill critical gaps left by the state, especially in regions like Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas, where they advocate for human rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Youth-led initiatives are especially prominent, with younger generations increasingly taking on leadership roles to drive governance and mental health initiatives, among other key issues.

For example, in Cuenca, JUNIL focuses on empowering youth through environmental and health projects, reinforcing youth leadership in areas like education and social engagement. In Guayaquil, Fundación Mujer y Mujer advocates for the rights of LGBTQ+ youth, fostering safe spaces and social inclusion. In the Amazon region, Sinchi Aya in Lago Agrio and Hermandad Amazónica in Puyo work to defend Indigenous rights and protect the environment. Meanwhile, in Quito, Fundación Moviciti addresses mobility and road safety, pushing for sustainable transportation policies. Together, these organizations showcase the essential role of CSOs in creating a more equitable and inclusive society across Ecuador.

3. **Challenges of Formalization and Resource Constraints:** One of the most significant challenges for emerging CSOs is formalization. A substantial portion of these organizations remains unregistered due to the cumbersome legal and bureaucratic processes required to gain official status. Additionally, financial limitations impede many CSOs from scaling their operations and forming partnerships with larger, more established organizations. As a result, non-registered organizations face difficulties in accessing crucial resources, including funding, training, and technical support, which are necessary for long-term sustainability and impact.
4. **Regional and Gender Dynamics Impacting CSO Operations:** The regional dynamics of CSOs in Ecuador reveal significant disparities in organizational capacity and leadership.

In cities like Quito and Guayaquil, CSOs tend to have more resources and access to national and international partners, which positions them to lead innovative initiatives. In contrast, organizations in smaller cities and rural areas such as Puyo and Lago Agrio are more likely to struggle with limited funding, technical expertise, and partnerships. Gender dynamics further complicate this landscape, as women play a leading role in many organizations, particularly in Esmeraldas and Lago Agrio, yet remain underrepresented in others, especially in male-dominated regions like Cuenca and Guayaquil. Non-binary leadership is still limited but is gaining visibility, especially in urban centers like Quito.

5. **Complex Digital Engagement Landscape:** The findings from both the survey and workshops highlight the complex landscape of technology adoption and digital tool use among emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ecuador. Emerging CSOs increasingly recognize the importance of the digital space to advance their missions, foster community involvement, and promote cultural initiatives. However, they face substantial barriers such as financial constraints, insufficient digital infrastructure, and gaps in digital skills, which limit their ability to fully leverage these tools. Urban-rural disparities are evident, with organizations in cities like Quito and Guayaquil being more advanced in their digital engagement compared to those in rural areas, where internet access and technical support are less available. Moreover, gender-based challenges are significant, with female-led organizations reporting weaker digital engagement and lower adoption of digital tools compared to male-led ones. This digital divide affects their ability to use social media and other online platforms for advocacy and community mobilization. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for these organizations to bridge the digital gap through partnerships with national CSOs, academia, and the private sector, as well as through the use of digital communication tools for education and capacity-building. CSOs are beginning to explore new methodologies for digital engagement, signaling a growing willingness to innovate and adapt to the digital age.
5. **Security and Political Instability as Major Barriers:** Emerging CSOs operate within a challenging socio-political environment characterized by insecurity, political instability, and corruption. This is particularly evident in regions where political interests and organized crime intersect, such as Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas. Many CSOs face threats, attacks, and extortion from criminal groups, while others must contend with opposition from entrenched political interests resistant to civil society activism. These security concerns not only hinder the ability of CSOs to operate effectively but also limit their capacity to engage with local authorities and communities in meaningful ways.
6. **Limited Access to Financial Resources:** A critical factor limiting the growth and impact of CSOs is their lack of access to consistent and sustainable funding sources. Most organizations operate with annual budgets of less than \$10,000, which severely constrains their ability to hire staff, invest in technology, or develop long-term projects. This reliance on volunteer work, combined with a lack of formalized funding channels, poses a significant challenge to scaling their operations and achieving financial sustainability. The competition for funds, particularly in cities like Quito and Guayaquil, further complicates the financial outlook for smaller or newer organizations.

## Recommendations

1. **Delivering Data and Results Back to Participating Organizations:** To foster trust and collaboration, it is essential to share data and findings from the research process with the CSOs involved. Providing tailored digital reports with key insights, hosting follow-up workshops, and creating interactive dashboards will allow organizations to directly engage with the information gathered. Additionally, anonymized data can be shared via a secure open data platform, empowering CSOs to use the data in their advocacy, decision-making, and capacity-building efforts. This approach not only values the contributions of participating CSOs but enhances their ability to make data-driven decisions that contribute to democratic consolidation and social impact.
2. **Develop Tailored Capacity-Building Programs with Concrete Outcome:** Capacity-building initiatives should be specifically designed to address the unique needs of emerging CSOs, particularly those in rural or under-resourced areas. Training should focus on practical skills like project management, financial accountability, partnership development, and advocacy, with clear outcome-based goals. Programs should prioritize empowering women and non-binary leaders and foster mentorship between new and established CSOs, creating pathways for sustained growth and stronger democratic engagement.
3. **Promote Digital Literacy and Gender-Inclusive Technology Training:** Bridging the digital divide requires targeted literacy programs, especially for female-led and rural CSOs. Training on social media, digital platforms, and collaborative tools can improve communication, outreach, and advocacy effectiveness. Programs should address the unique challenges faced by women and LGBTQAI+ individuals in adopting these technologies, reducing gender disparities in digital engagement and supporting democratic participation. The high level of youth involvement in emerging CSOs reflects a promising trend in civic engagement. To sustain and expand this involvement, it is recommended that targeted strategies be developed, focusing on digital tools and culturally relevant initiatives that resonate with younger audiences. These mechanisms can promote consistent participation in democratic processes beyond electoral cycles, creating pathways for meaningful engagement and leadership opportunities for new generation
4. **Foster Strategic Alliances with National and International Stakeholders to Enhance Impact:** For greater sustainability, emerging CSOs would benefit from partnerships with national governments, international organizations, private sector entities, and academic institutions. These alliances offer access to resources, technical expertise, and networks that can expand their reach and impact. Collaborating with organizations like USAID, GIZ, and UNICEF can open up funding opportunities, especially for CSOs in vulnerable regions working on human rights or environmental justice. Multi-stakeholder platforms can also promote innovative solutions and strengthen governance, aligning these partnerships with democratic goals.
5. **Facilitate Partnerships between Emerging CSOs and Medium-Sized NGOs for Democratic Strengthening:** Donors should support partnerships between emerging CSOs and medium-sized NGOs, providing mentorship and technical expertise in areas like digital transformation, financial management, and advocacy. By funding joint

projects and infrastructure-sharing, these partnerships would not only build capacity but also promote democratic values and governance in Ecuador. Monitoring these partnerships will ensure they yield concrete, impactful outcomes that strengthen civil society.

6. **Increase Funding Opportunities and Financial Sustainability with Clear Outcomes:** Emerging CSOs require sustainable funding to achieve lasting impact. Donors could create small grants aimed at new and non-registered CSOs, addressing common funding barriers. Additionally, supporting CSOs in developing revenue-generating activities, such as training and consultancy, would enable them to rely less on external funding. Financial literacy and fundraising training should focus on outcome-based strategies that allow CSOs to sustain their operations and contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation.
7. **Promote Gender Equality and Leadership Diversity for Inclusive Democratic Participation:** Programs that support the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in CSO leadership roles are essential for creating a more inclusive civil society. Mentorship programs, gender-awareness training, and leadership workshops can empower these groups, especially in regions where leadership is traditionally male-dominated. Encouraging CSOs to adopt gender-sensitive policies will promote equal representation in decision-making, strengthening civil society's role in democratic processes and fostering a more equitable Ecuador.

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# Annexes

## Annexe 1.- Local workshops summary

Variables	Participantes	Type of CSOs		Gender			Age
	Total	Registered	Non-registered	Female	Male	Non-binary	Average
Lago Agrio	56	38%	63%	59%	41%	0%	41
Esmeraldas	38	45%	55%	74%	26%	0%	38
Quito	33	67%	33%	52%	45%	3%	37
Ibarra	32	44%	56%	50%	47%	3%	32
Puyo	25	44%	56%	52%	48%	0%	34
Cuenca	24	83%	17%	29%	67%	4%	35
Guayaquil	14	100%	0%	36%	64%	0%	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>37</b>

## Annexe 2.- Emerging CSO Survey summary

Variables	CSO's type	Number	Percentage	Gender		Main city		
				Female	Male	Guayaquil	Quito	Rest of the country
Registered CSO's	Foundation	65	66%	52%	48%	14%	29%	57%
	Association	18	18%	56%	44%	17%	17%	67%
	Other form of CSO	10	10%	30%	70%	20%	10%	70%
	Corporation	6	6%	50%	50%	0%	50%	50%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>60%</b>
Non-registered CSO's	Collective	28	40%	57%	39%	14%	21%	64%
	Group	20	29%	65%	25%	10%	35%	55%
	Other	16	23%	56%	44%	0%	31%	69%
	Movement	3	4%	33%	67%	0%	33%	67%
	Alliance	2	3%	50%	0%	50%	0%	50%
	Guild	1	1%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>63%</b>

Variables	CSO's type	Representative age	Representative position	Highest decision-making body	Meeting frequency of the highest decision-making body	Majority composition of the highest decision-making body	Representation of minority groups in the highest decision-making body
		Average	Mode	Mode	Mode	Mode	Mode
Registered CSO's	Foundation	39	President	General assembly	Once a month	Female	Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples and nationalities
	Association	45	President	General assembly	Once a month	Female	Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples and nationalities
	Other form of CSO	43	President	General assembly	Once a month	Female	Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples and nationalities
	Corporation	45	President	Board of members	Once every six months	Female	Other
	<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>General assembly</b>	<b>Once a month</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples and nationalities</b>
Non-registered CSO's	Collective	33	Coordinator	General assembly	Once a month	Female	Youth between 18 and 30 years old
	Group	39	Coordinator	General assembly	Once a month	Female	Youth between 18 and 30 years old
	Other	36	Coordinator	Board of members	Once a month	Female	Youth between 18 and 30 years old
	Movement	27	Coordinator	General assembly	Once a month	Male	Youth between 18 and 30 years old
	Alliance	32	Coordinator	Advisory council	Once a month	Female	Youth between 18 and 30 years old
	Guild	24	Representative	Representative	Once a month	Male	LGBTIQ+ group
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>General assembly</b>	<b>Once a month</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Youth between 18 and 30 years old</b>

Variables	CSO's type	CSO's scope	Number of collaborators	Paid collaborators	Volunteer collaborators	Annual budget	Funding source
		Mode	Average	Average	Average	Mode	Mode
Registered CSO's	Foundation	National	9	1	7	Less than 10 thousand dollars	Own funds
	Association	National	26	1	13	Less than 10 thousand dollars	We do not receive funding
	Other form of CSO	National	13	1	6	Less than 10 thousand dollars	We do not receive funding
	Corporation	National	10	3	3	Less than 10 thousand dollars	Service provision
	<b>Total</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Less than 10 thousand dollars</b>	<b>Own funds</b>
Non-registered CSO's	Collective	Provincial	21	0	13	Less than 10 thousand dollars	We do not receive funding
	Group	Parochial	14	1	5	Less than 10 thousand dollars	We do not receive funding
	Other	National	15	0	12	Less than 10 thousand dollars	We do not receive funding
	Movement	Provincial	25	1	21	Less than 10 thousand dollars	Own funds
	Alliance	Provincial	40	21	40	Less than 10 thousand dollars	Grants
	Guild	Provincial	3	1	2	Less than 10 thousand dollars	Own funds
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Provincial</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Less than 10 thousand dollars</b>	<b>We do not receive funding</b>

### Annex 3: Directory of CSOs Participating in the Research

*(Document attached)*



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