

## Note: Choosing Between Open and Direct Selection of CSO Partners

According to the [Procedure on Programme Implementation: Work Planning, Partnerships and Risk Management](#), partnerships with CSOs require a transparent open selection process in the UN Partner Portal. Where open selection is not feasible, offices select CSO partners using a direct selection process in accordance with the [Programme Implementation Handbook](#).

Recent audits and evaluations have flagged an over-reliance on direct selection—often without sufficient justification and proper documentation—undermining competition, localization, and price discovery that open selection in UNPP is designed to deliver. This note aims to assist Country Offices in selecting appropriate modalities, reducing unjustified direct selections, and ensuring transparency, localization, and value for money (VfM) as staffing and budgets tighten.

### Core Principles

- **Open selection is the default:** Use direct selection only when specific conditions are met and documented.
- **VfM and Results:** Selection modality must optimize results and VfM while managing risk proportionately.
- **Localization:** Open selection should expand access for capable local/national CSOs and diversify the partner base.
- **Verifiability:** Every deviation from open selection must be justified with evidence and approvals from Deputy Representative Programme (or equivalent) captured in [UNPP](#).

### When Direct Selection May Be Justified

- **Emergency:** life-saving response in initial surge/scale-up where delay risks lives or access; or security/access constraints restrict options and per flexibilities allowed by emergency procedures.
- **Sole feasible provider:** legal mandate (e.g., only CSO authorized in camps), or exclusive community access
- **Continuity and timeframe:** short bridge ( $\leq 6$  months) to avoid service interruption while an open process runs, if the programme is expected to run for less than 6 months or if an open selection process was carried out within a short timeframe for a similar project in the same area.

- **Unique contexts:** Complex and contested contexts where low-profile programming is preferred to minimize scrutiny from authorities e.g. Myanmar
- **Donor Preference:** Donor indication of a preferred partner must be supported by documented rationales and formal approval by Deputy Representative of Programme (or equivalent).

### **Situations That Do Not Justify Direct Selection**

Direct selection should not be used in the following circumstances:

- **Familiarity or Past Performance:** A history of positive collaboration or satisfactory performance alone is not sufficient justification.
- **Limited Staffing or Time Constraints:** Operational workload or delays in planning do not warrant bypassing open selection.
- **Assumption of Similar Outcomes:** The expectation that competition would produce the same results does not justify excluding other potential partners.

### **Good Practice Recommendations**

To strengthen transparency and compliance with partner selection, Country Offices are encouraged to:

- **Plan Early:** Integrate open selection timelines into annual workplans and PCA calendars to prevent last-minute direct selections. CSO mapping does not constitute an open selection process.
- **Promote Partner Readiness:** Support national and local CSOs to register and maintain complete, up-to-date UNPP profiles (including child profiles) to ensure eligibility.
- **Ensure Robust Documentation:** Keep clear and complete records of all justification notes, approvals, and communications in the UNPP partner file.
- **Strengthen Monitoring and Oversight:** Regularly review the ratio of open-to-direct selections at the office level to identify trends, capacity needs, and areas for improvement.