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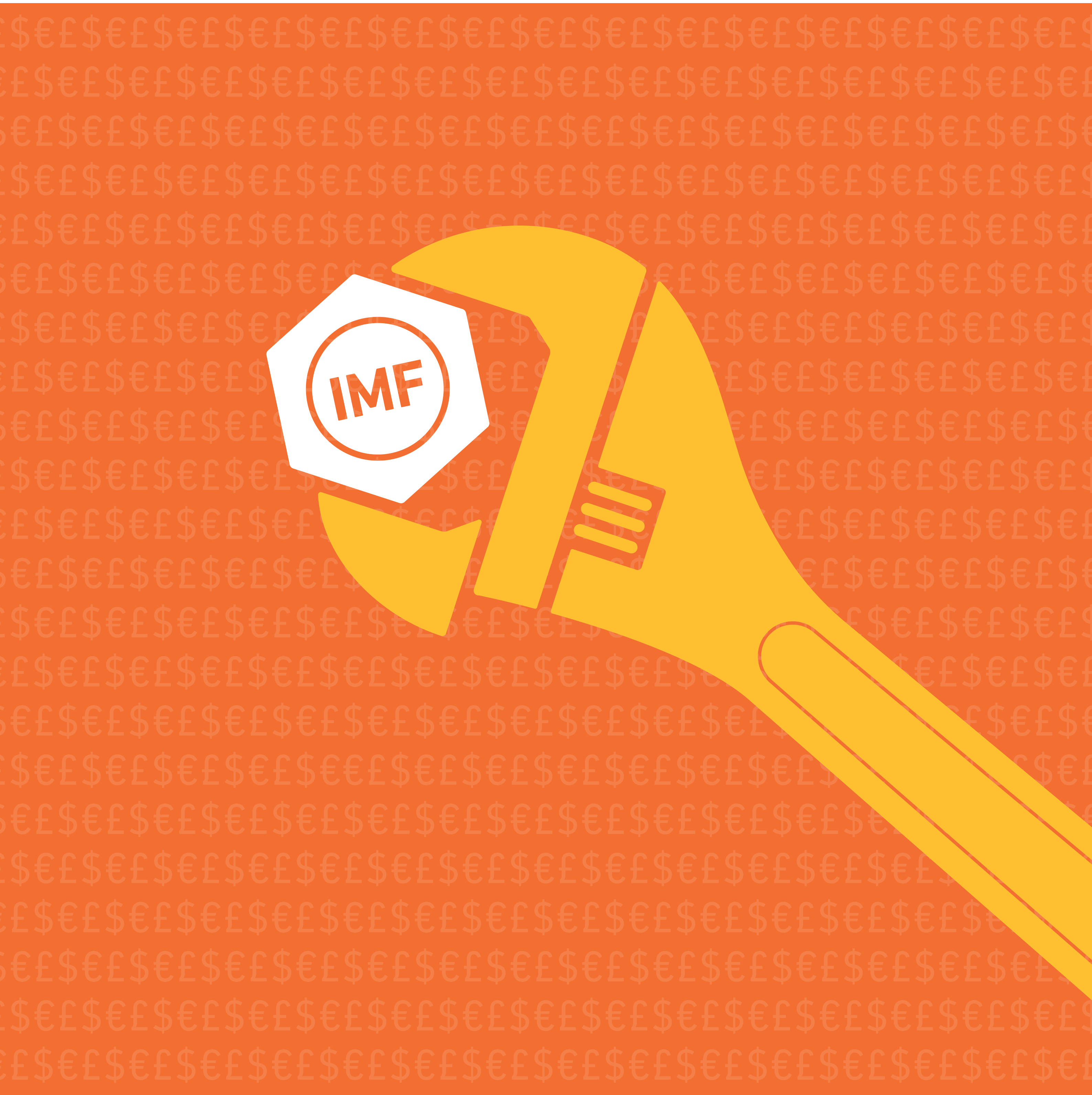
european network on debt and development

A toolkit for advocacy at the International Monetary Fund

Prepared by Eurodad, April 2018



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Introduction

This toolkit aims to support civil society advocacy towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In Part 1, it provides an overview of the institution: its main functions, its governance, and how EU Member States influence its decision-making. In Part 2, you will find guidance on finding and understanding information on Fund activities, and on how civil society organisations (CSOs) can direct IMF-focused advocacy and campaign work.

The toolkit is principally targeted at CSOs based in the EU, and those working on development finance issues within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The IMF is a key part of the international financial architecture and wields huge influence over the domestic economic policies of impoverished countries through its core work.The IMF's activities impact heavily on a range of issues including, education, health, social protection, tax justice, labour rights, youth unemployment, climate change resilience, and inequality: meaning it directly impacts the enjoyment of human rights across the world.

This toolkit is therefore intended to be an accessible resource for any organisation working on these issues and that wants to begin or step up its advocacy towards the IMF. Given the bearing that the IMF has on how able the Global South will be to finance and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, it is critical for CSOs to contribute their voices to its work.

The IMF is a key part of the international financial architecture and wields huge influence over the domestic economic policies of impoverished countries

A brief history of the IMF

The IMF was created in 1944 in the wake of the Great Depression, and it continues to be shaped by economic crises. The Fund was first set up to coordinate the so-called Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and to encourage international trade. Under the system, currencies were pegged to the US dollar, itself pegged to gold, and when a country ran down its foreign reserves to keep up the value of its currency, short-term IMF loans were meant to shore these up. During the 1950s and 1960s, IMF lending was mainly provided to richer countries, but when the Bretton Woods system collapsed in 1973, the role of the Fund had to evolve.

Meanwhile, IMF membership was expanding to include many newly-independent ex-colonies. The Fund shifted its focus from currency problems towards low-interest and often longer-term lending to developing countries facing a wider range of systemic crises, from banking to sovereign debt distress. But these loans, markedly institutionalised under the Structural Adjustment Facilities of the 1980s, came with strict conditionalities attached, as the IMF demanded wide-ranging domestic policy changes from borrowing countries in exchange for its funds. Loan durations began to lengthen, with many countries requiring repeated IMF support amid chronic debt crises – questioning the effectiveness of IMF policy orthodoxy. The adverse impact of these loan programs on development and human rights in the Global South saw the Fund come under huge criticism, and contributed to the push for major debt relief initiatives in the late 1990s.

The credibility of the Fund suffered further during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, and in the intervening years there were signs that its role in the international economy would diminish. Nevertheless, despite failing to predict the global financial crisis of 2008, recent years have seen a more prominent role for the institution, as its finances were significantly increased and it has again begun lending – often in very large amounts – to higher income countries, notably Greece.[1]

Lending with conditionality

The activity for which the IMF is perhaps best known is the provision of loans to countries facing current or likely (short-term) problems with their balance of payments (essentially the difference in a country's export income and the cost of its imports), often the trigger for a financial crisis. IMF loans may be precautionary or emergency in nature, with emergency financing provided to countries which may have no other possibilities to borrow (e.g. from banks, or by issuing bonds). This is why the Fund is sometimes referred to as the 'international lender of last resort'. The necessity to borrow from the IMF may be due to domestic weaknesses, such as a high level of public debt, or due to an external shock, such as a natural disaster which heavily damages the national economy.

The IMF lends to member countries through a number of different instruments, depending upon a country's level of development and the nature of the crisis it is facing. Loans can be provided at market rates (non-concessional lending) or at low or zero interest (concessional lending). Concessional loans are available to low-income countries via three instruments under the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT). But unlike development banks, the IMF does not provide project support: IMF financing is rather directed at restoring a country's overall economic stability and growth. IMF loans have to be requested by a country in difficulty, with most lending instruments requiring a country to commit to a number of economic policy changes ('conditionalities') before financing is provided. Conditionalities can touch upon issues including debt, tax, labour, or social protection, and are negotiated with the Fund's management and staff, and then signed off by the IMF Executive Board. The set of policy changes is known as a 'program' and generally spans a three-year period. (Countries subject to such a loan program are therefore often referred to as 'program countries' or countries under a program.) The IMF can cut off credit if it considers a country is failing to meet conditionalities during the course of a loan, giving it huge influence over the economic direction of a borrowing country and its ability to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Conditionality has often been linked to the imposition of austerity measures and cuts to public spending on health and education, for example, heavily impacting the enjoyment of human rights.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, the IMF's lending capacity was tripled from 250m USD to 750m USD. And in 2015, the IMF made more money available for low-income countries, widening their possibilities to access funds at zero per cent interest rates: this was subsequently framed as a contribution to supporting the Financing for Development (FfD) agenda. At the time of writing, the IMF had approximately 9.4bn USD of outstanding loans to low-income countries, with a further 17.3bn USD available for concessional lending and 319.8bn USD for non-concessional loans. The largest borrowers were, however, middle- or even high income countries in financial troubles: namely Greece, Ukraine, and Pakistan.

Surveillance of economic developments

The second key pillar of the IMF's work is its regular monitoring of the economic and financial health of its 189 member countries, and of regional and global economic trends. This is known as 'surveillance', and its key outputs are annual or biannual country assessments known as 'Article IV consultation reports', which include IMF policy recommendations and advice to national authorities. This type of 'bilateral' surveillance (or monitoring focused on a specific country) therefore spells out what the IMF thinks a country's economic policies should look like, irrespective of whether it is receiving a loan from the institution, and can heavily shape national policy-making and strategies to meet financing gaps for development.

Fund staff compile Article IV reports using data gathered through discussions with a country's government and are increasingly trying to widen engagement with other domestic actors such as investors and CSOs, to ensure more relevant macroeconomic advice: though there has been criticism that the IMF is failing to regularly consult relevant national CSOs.

According to the ambitions of the Fund, policy advice in its surveillance work is being widened to respond to the 2030 development agenda, and encompass issues including income and gender inequality, financial inclusion, and climate resilience – where it considers them to be relevant to the health and stability of the overall economy (or 'macro-critical'). Critics have pointed to the ad hoc nature of the attention given to these issues in Article IV reports, and the often contradictory policy advice to countries, such as a continued promotion of austerity while encouraging greater female labour force participation. Country authorities have themselves pointed to the need for the Fund to take more account of their views in surveillance work, and that it is 'biased in favour of large advanced markets'.

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Alongside Article IVs, the IMF also issues a *World Economic Outlook*, and corresponding regional reports which gather its national level monitoring and policy advice together in so-called 'multilateral' surveillance work. Much of the data gathered through this surveillance work is published by the Fund in some of the most important public databases on international finance and debt.

Technical Assistance to public authorities

The third main element of the work of the IMF is known as technical assistance (TA): this includes advice, practical support, or training to government authorities to build up a country's economic and financial management capacity. The Fund is the largest worldwide provider of this type of assistance, and it is often delivered in conjunction with a country program or surveillance work. In 2016, almost 50 per cent of TA was directed towards low-income developing countries, with Sub-Saharan Africa the largest recipient. Examples of assistance include technical support to improve a country's tax administration (Côte d'Ivoire, 2016); support for fiscal data management (Botswana, 2015); or training civil servants in low-income countries on undertaking debt sustainability assessments.

TA is promoted as a response to the needs of recipient countries, but it is done with the financial and technical support of some of the IMF's main shareholding countries, meaning they hold significant influence over the shape of 'best practice' legal and policy reforms promoted through this type of work. Moreover, the Fund generally does not publish any TA documents, and this lack of transparency over the exact nature of assistance provided to a country has prompted concerns within civil society about its development effectiveness.

In response to the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, the IMF has boosted its TA work in a number of areas including domestic resource mobilization, public investment, financial inclusion, gender budgeting, and national statistical systems. A greater focus is also being placed on support for 'fragile and small developing countries'. This has resulted, for example, in pilot Climate Change Policy Assessments in cooperation with the World Bank (Seychelles, 2017); the promotion of private sector investment to address infrastructure gaps (Colombia, 2015); and the promotion of policies to mitigate increasing income inequality. Nevertheless, despite broadening the scope of TA, observers remain sceptical about whether the Fund has gone far enough to question the narrow economic orthodoxy that has underpinned its work for decades, and as such, how far this work will result in genuinely structural rather than superficial change.

Who decides what the IMF does?

The Board of Governors

The highest decision-making body of the IMF is its Board of Governors, made up of two representatives from each of the 189 member countries: one governor and one alternate, with each member able to appoint up to seven advisors. Countries appoint their Governors, who are usually finance ministers or heads of central banks, for an unspecified term. The Board of Governors has delegated most of its powers to the Executive Board, but is still responsible for some key issues such as electing the members of the Executive Board every two years; deciding on quota increases (see box); the allocation of special drawing rights (SDRs);[2] and amending the Fund's articles of agreement (its main internal rules).

The Board of Governors meets every autumn to carry out is main work, including selecting a new Chair each year: this takes place jointly with the corresponding Board of the World Bank during the IMF-WB Annual Meetings. Discussions usually span a broad range of issues related to national and global macro-economic developments, and recently, the institutions have focused on a number of key FfD topics, such as the increased mobilisation of private finance for development, and the significance of income inequality to economic growth.

Decisions by the Board of Governors are taken by vote – and can be made in writing outside the annual meetings – based upon each Governor's respective country quota (weighted vote). Most require a simple majority, but decisions on a number of significant issues are subject to so-called 'special majorities' of either 70% or 85%. These include decisions on investment of IMF funds (70%), on the rates charged on the use of IMF resources (70%), on most amendments to Articles of Agreement or adjustments in quotas and SDR allocations (both 85%). Power within the Board of Governors rests securely with its major shareholders – the total voting share of OECD countries is over 63% – with the US effectively holding veto power over major decisions given its 16.5% quota. Critics have highlighted this structural imbalance and continue to call for reforms to IMF decision-making to give developing countries a bigger voice. Proposals include the introduction of double majority voting, with decisions requiring the support of both a majority of states and of weighted votes.

The IMF quota system at a glance

Voting power at the IMF is governed by a quota system. Each country is allocated a quota share, in an effort to distribute power according to the relative economic position of member countries in the world economy. Quotas are supposed to be reviewed at least every five years and calculated through a formula which focuses mainly on the size and openness of a country's economy. The current formula comprises four elements:

- **GDP**, blending level at market exchange rates and on purchasing power parity (50 per cent weight),
- **Openness** to international trade and financial flows (30 per cent)
- **Economic variability** of export and FDI earnings and net capital flows (15 per cent) and
- **International reserves** (5 per cent).

Quota reviews deal with two key issues: "the size of an overall increase [in quotas] and the distribution of the increase among members". Reviews are designed to "assess the adequacy of quotas in terms of members' balance of payments financing needs and in terms of its own ability to help meet those needs". The last review took place in 2010.

Along with voting power, quotas also play a role in determining how much money a member country has to contribute to the IMF reserves, and how much money it is allowed to borrow from the Fund.

Quotas are denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF's internal reserve asset, the value of which is based on a basket of currencies: the US dollar, the euro, the Japanese yen, the British pound, and the Chinese renminbi/yuan.

Source: brettonwoodsproject.org and imf.org

The International Monetary and Financial Committee

The International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) is one of two IMF ministerial level bodies. It advises the Board of Governors, with responsibilities including oversight of the global economic and monetary system – and dealing with sudden disruptions to it – and reviewing proposed changes to the IMF articles of agreement. The composition of the IMFC mirrors that of the Executive Board constituency system (see below), with 24 members made up of finance ministers, central bank heads, or others of 'comparable rank'. In practice, IMFC members are drawn from the Board of Governors, but may not necessarily be from the same country as their Executive Board constituency counterpart. The Chair is selected by IMFC members, generally for a three-year period (there is no official term limit).

The IMFC meets twice a year at the IMF-WB Spring and Annual Meetings, and although it has no formal powers, takes no decisions, and doesn't hold votes, it is the political powerhouse of the Fund, effectively driving its strategic direction and giving ministerial-level sign off to the Executive Board's work. This is most visible in the communiqués issued by the IMFC immediately after its biannual meetings which guide the development of the IMF work program for the next six months.

As is the case for other IMF bodies, the IMFC reflects the structural power imbalance at the heart of the Fund. However, in January 2018, the Committee appointed its first chair from Sub-Saharan Africa, Lesetja Kganyago, Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, which could signal an opportunity for the work of the Fund to represent better the priorities of its entire membership.

The total voting share of OECD countries at the IMF is over 63% – with the US effectively holding veto power over major decisions given its 16.5% quota

The Development Committee

The Joint Ministerial Committee of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank and the IMF on the Transfer of Real Resources to Developing Countries – or the Development Committee – is an advisory body to the boards of governors of both institutions. It meets biannually – at the IMF-WB Spring and Annual Meetings – and focuses on urgent matters related to the economic development of the world's poorest countries, including international trade and payments; the flow of capital; investment; and official development assistance. As such, IMF policies on issues including debt relief or poverty reduction may be dealt with by the Development Committee as well as the IMFC.

The membership of the Development Committee extends beyond Bank/Fund governors to include development ministers also. However, the composition varies from that of the IMFC as for two years it mirrors the constituency system of the IMF (24 members), and for the following two years, the constituency system of the World Bank (25 members). The Committee selects a chair from amongst its members, as well as an Executive Secretary responsible for day to day coordination work.

The Development Committee is increasingly seen as more of a World Bank committee, due to its mandate, but its discussions are intended to provide strategic guidance to the Executive Boards of both the Bank and Fund. Like the IMFC, the Development Committee issues this guidance principally through a communiqué summarising the outcomes of its biannual meetings.

To help CSOs make sense out of the IMFC and Development Committee communiqués, Eurodad and other organisations such as the Bretton Woods Project produce short analyses on their websites following the Spring and Annual Meetings. Look out for these blogposts to support your advocacy and campaign work on the Fund.

The Executive Board

The IMF Executive Board (the 'Board') is currently made up of 24 Executive Directors (EDs), representing the Fund's 189 member countries, and is chaired by the IMF Managing Director. The Board is responsible for undertaking the day-to-day work of the Fund, meeting almost every day (EDs can request a meeting on any issue), and signs off on the Fund's policies and all lending decisions.

EDs are based permanently in Washington DC, and following reforms implemented in 2016, all are now elected for renewable two-year terms. In the past, five countries appointed their EDs to permanent seats: nonetheless, in view of their voting power, eight of the world's largest economies, including three EU Member States, effectively continue to hold permanent, single seats on the Board. These states are, by voting power: the USA, Japan, China, Germany, France, the UK, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. Other states are grouped in constituencies of between four and 24 countries, broadly by geography. In principle, countries are free to choose their constituency, but in practice, changes imply a re-assessment of the entire configuration.

Each constituency elects its own Executive Director who represents their common positions at the Board, and the post is either reserved for one or several of the constituency's largest members by voting power, or with the post rotating amongst all members. To illustrate this, the Netherlands and Belgium are in a constituency of 15 countries, but the post of ED only rotates between these two members. The 'Nordic-Baltic' constituency meanwhile, rotates its ED post amongst all eight members, though the length of time each country holds the mandate differs according to its relative voting power. Relative influence on constituency positions – not only Board decisions – is therefore also linked to voting power and the composition of the constituency, and CSOs should consider these factors strategically when approaching their national ED. High income countries ultimately have a majority of Board seats, and many developing countries find themselves represented by a rich country. Civil society has long pointed to the overrepresentation of richer countries – Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, has only two EDs representing 46 countries, and as is the case in the Board of Governors, the US holds an effective veto on substantive decisions which often require an 85% majority to pass.

The Managing Director

The IMF **Managing Director** (MD) heads the institution's staff and is also (non-voting) chair of the Executive Board. S/he can attend Board of Governors' meetings and is responsible for the organisation and recruitment of staff. In practice, the MD is often also the 'public face' of the Fund. The post is assisted by a First Deputy MD and three Deputy MDs.

The Executive Board appoints the MD for a renewable five-year term, generally by consensus rather than via a formal vote. Governors and Executive Directors may nominate nationals from any member country, and since 2011, a **selection process** intended to be more 'open, merit-based, and transparent' has been in place. In practice however, the selection of the MD has always been an opaque exercise governed by a **'gentleman's agreement'** originating from the 1944 Bretton Woods Conferences, ensuring that the IMF MD is from Europe and the World Bank President from the USA. This has long been **criticised by CSOs** and developing countries, but the disproportionate power of the USA and Europe at the Fund means the unwritten policy remains. Executive Directors from the **BRICS countries were openly critical** of the process in 2011, however a European, Christine Lagarde, was nonetheless appointed, and subsequently re-appointed in 2016. While some argue that this was due to emerging economies failing to agree on a single candidate, signs of shifting influence were noted in the appointment of a Chinese Deputy MD in 2011 for the first time. Nonetheless, the Executive Board also plays a hand in approving these positions, with the gentleman's agreement also ensuring that the First Deputy MD is always a US national.

The EU's role in IMF decision-making

The constituency system in the Executive Board (which is mirrored in the IMFC) means that EU Member States do not formally speak with a single voice at the IMF. Despite holding one-third of Board seats, and more than 30% of vote share, they are spread over seven constituencies and three single seats, with no common EU or Eurozone representation, and several are in constituencies mainly composed of non-EU countries. (For example, Spain is in the Central American constituency, and Ireland is in the Canadian and Caribbean constituency). The European Central Bank (ECB) is the only EU institution to have observer status at the Board, in view of its monetary policy functions, and can participate in meetings on specified topics of relevance to its mandate (e.g. Article IV surveillance of Eurozone countries).

This situation has led to concerns that the Eurozone in particular 'punches below its weight' at the Fund, despite EU Member States arguably being overrepresented on the Executive Board. The European Commission is currently leading calls for stronger coordination amongst Euro area countries, including proposals for a single seat for the Eurozone at the Executive Board by 2025, with an ED elected from a Eurozone only constituency/ies, and participation of the Eurogroup President, in this explicit capacity, at the Board of Governors: EU Member States are, however, yet to agree to this, in part due to the fact that some stand to lose their privileged ED status at the Fund.

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How do EU Member States coordinate their IMF positions?

Despite the lack of formal EU representation on the IMF Executive Board, EU Member States do have both formal and informal mechanisms to discuss IMF policy issues, and to develop common positions.

The SCIMF

At the institutional level in Brussels, IMF issues are formally dealt with by the Economic and Financial Affairs configuration (Ecofin) of the Council of the EU, and work is mandated to its Economic and Finances Committee (EFC). An EFC sub-committee on the IMF (SCIMF) was set up in 2001 to allow for a permanent monitoring of IMF matters, composed of two representatives per Member State (from the ministry of finance, and from the central bank), two from the European Commission (without voting power) and two from the ECB. IMF representatives may also join SCIMF meetings on an ad hoc basis, for specific agenda items.

The SCIMF is chaired by an EFC member elected for three to five years by the SCIMF, and convention dictates that the Chair comes from a G7 country which doesn't hold the EFC presidency. Though meeting frequency is not fixed, the SCIMF generally holds two physical meetings per year – prior to the Annual and Spring Meetings of the IMF – and four teleconferences. The Chair calls meetings and drives the agenda, based upon two half-yearly work plans building on the issues being discussed at the IMF Board. In practice, much of the work of the SCIMF focuses on longer-term, strategic policy issues (such as IMF resources and quota redistribution), and it also produces common messages regularly on issues such as Article IV surveillance of the Eurozone; IMF assessment of the stability of the EU financial sector; and on specific IMF staff papers. In the past, common messages have also been developed on development finance issues such as the Monterrey and Johannesburg 2002 conferences.

The SCIMF secretariat in the European Commission, housed in the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs, is generally in the driving seat for the initial drafting of these messages, in cooperation with the SCIMF Chair; and EU countries holding IMF ED seats are generally the most active in feeding in with comments. Nonetheless, while these messages are then transmitted to EU Member State representatives at the IMF, they do not bind their positions in Board discussions. Alignment of positions tends to be on issues for which competences have been transferred from Member States to the EU. Alignment is harder to reach on issues such as the surveillance of financial assistance to third countries and where countries have different political interests in international financial matters.[3]

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EURIMF

A more informal, but arguably more influential coordination mechanism is the EURIMF, which from 1998 has gathered EU Member State representatives (EDs, Alternates, or advisors) in Washington at least once a week. The group follows the day-to-day work of the Executive Board and works to build common EU positions – looking mainly at Article IV consultations for EU states, as well as all major Board agenda items. Prior to each Board meeting, each constituency prepares a (non-public) common statement – known as a 'gray' – setting out its views on each agenda item. The lead EU country from each constituency presents their respective grays at the EURIMF and effort is made to develop a common EU gray: where this is achieved, the EURIMF President will present this to the Executive Board.

Nonetheless, where a common position has not been transferred from the political level – principally via a SCIMF common message – EDs in Washington have little mandate to carve out EU positions. In practice, coordination tends to be limited: the European Commission, which along with the ECB, attends EURIMF meetings, has noted the 'many examples where coordination on key IMF files has been suboptimal or where the Member States decided to support their national positions rather than defend the common Union position'. The frequency of EURIMF meetings and its location in Washington do, however, mean that the mechanism arguably has more possibility than the SCIMF to influence day-to-day IMF Board discussions.

The EURIMF President has, since 2007, been elected from among the EU EDs at the IMF, for a two-year period. As such, the position is not linked to the rotating EU Council Presidency. The EURIMF President acts as a liaison to IMF management and staff, and regularly attends SCIMF meetings to provide the latter with a briefing on IMF issues and ensure coherence in their respective work. Nonetheless, while responsible for presenting common EU statements to the Board, the primary function of the ED holding the presidency is still to represent their own constituency.

Part 2: Finding out what the IMF is saying and doing[4]

Country specific documents

It can be difficult for a non-expert to navigate through the IMF website and find the information they need, but a lot of country-specific data is gathered on individual country pages. This includes regularly updated figures on outstanding loans (under 'Financial position in the Fund'); historical information about how much money the country has borrowed from the IMF in the past ('Transactions with the Fund'); and the contact details for the IMF 'Resident Representative' in the country. (Note that contact details for the Washington DC-based 'Mission Chief' for the country, and arguably more influential figure on Fund policy towards a country, do not feature here.) Particular types of documents (e.g. Debt Sustainability Analyses, or Poverty Reduction Strategies) are increasingly grouped in single, searchable databases covering all relevant countries. Finding these databases is not always straightforward, so it is worth making full use of the site's search functions. You should also sign up to IMF email alerts to receive regular updates on key Fund announcements.

Economic assessments: Article IV reports

Regular monitoring of the economic health of every IMF member country is one of the Fund's key tasks, and these assessments are issued as so-called 'Article IV consultation reports', generally on an annual basis.

These reports are a rich source of information on a government's financing and spending priorities, including a narrative overview which covers issues such as spending on education or infrastructure, debt levels, and taxation, and the IMF's opinions about these plans. The scope of budget data and growth projections provides insight into government plans on public sector expenditure (e.g. 'spending on wages') for example. If you are engaging in country-specific advocacy and campaigning in relation to the IMF, then Article IV reports are an essential reference to know what the Fund is recommending to a particular government: and it is worth identifying where the positions of your government and the Fund differ (e.g. on levels of social spending) and how they align with your organisation's priorities. Review these reports before any key meetings with government officials, IMF staff, or EDs. Note, however, that a country has to consent to the public release of its Article IV report, but almost all currently do so.[5]

Article IV reports will also provide general information on how much money a country owes to the Fund, in a section on 'Fund relations' or 'Relations with the Fund', and information about the Resident IMF Representative in the country. Sections on relations with the World Bank and other multilateral development banks often provide basic information on loans, grants, and activities by these institutions in the country.

Debt Sustainability Analyses

Article IV reports will also include a summary of the latest Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) carried out by the Fund. For low-income countries, extensive DSAs are regular, standalone assessments of how able the IMF thinks a country is to manage its current debts and its capacity to take on more risk: these are conducted for all countries that are eligible to borrow from the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT).[6]

The DSA looks at outstanding debt levels and sets out different scenarios for debt servicing based on its own growth projections for the country, providing recommendations for a borrowing strategy. It doesn't attach a specific figure to determine an absolute level of sustainable debt for a country, or define when a debt stock will become unsustainable, but assigns a 'risk rating' of external debt distress: low, medium, high, or in debt distress. Reviewing a DSA lets you know what concerns the IMF has about a country's fiscal position, its financing needs – and possible options – and additional information such as on some of the 'contingent liabilities' weighing on a government budget (e.g. the costs they would need to cover if a state-owned enterprise in the financial sector were to face financial difficulties). It can therefore be a crucial resource to understand the advice a country is receiving to fund its development priorities under the SDGs.

DSAs are intended to play a key, guiding role in decisions about lending to and borrowing by the governments of low-income countries. For example, the Fund uses DSAs to set public borrowing limits for countries under an IMF program; while the World Bank uses DSA risk ratings to determine the proportion of loans or grants it provides to a recipient country. OECD countries, meanwhile, should not lend at non-concessional rates (i.e. at market rates) to countries assessed at moderate or high risk of debt distress. It is not always the case, however, that lenders stick to these guidelines.

Reviewing DSAs will allow you to build up a picture of how the IMF is approaching debt issues with different countries, the advice it is giving, and its budgetary concerns related, for example, to governments' embarking on mega-infrastructure projects in partnership with private finance. If working on a group of low-income countries, be sure to review each DSA to see where IMF positions may differ (e.g. on recommendations to protect social expenditure), or where there is consistency (revealing predominant IMF policy). If working on a specific country, you may wish to look at a number of recent DSAs, e.g. to identify where the IMF has failed to warn of debt distress prior to a debt crisis occurring.[7]

Conditionality: Letters of intent & Memoranda of Economic and Financial Policies

The policies to which a government commits in order to secure an IMF loan are known as 'conditionalities'. These are negotiated with the Fund's management and staff and set down in a so-called 'Letter of Intent' (LOI) and a 'Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies' (MEFP) attached to it. The decision to lend is then signed off by the IMF Executive Board in a 'Technical Memorandum of Understanding' (TMU) which details how the Fund intends to measure whether a borrowing country is meeting the agreed conditionalities.

LOIs and the associated memoranda reveal the influence that the Fund can have in directing domestic government policy: indeed, while they are supposedly drafted by the borrowing country's government, in practice, IMF staff are deeply involved in the design of conditionalities.[8] These documents are the place to learn more about a country's economic program and whether, for example, it is being steered towards domestic austerity – with adverse impacts on health, education or social spending – in order to release IMF financing.

While it may not reveal exactly how much pressure is being exerted by the Fund itself, the LOI is an invaluable guide to planned changes in fiscal policy or any legislative measures in the pipeline – such as the privatisation of key public assets, or limits on debt financing – and often indicates a timeline for each policy measure. The TMU will also contain details about the fiscal data that a country needs to provide regularly to the Fund. Countries have to agree to publishing loan-related documents but almost all can be found on the IMF's website, with 100% publication rates in 2016.[9]

The IMF undertakes regular reviews of how a country is meeting its loan conditionalities, and further disbursements are only made once these reviews are completed or approved by the Executive Board. Look out for the documents published as part of these reviews, which will contain additional data on changes to programs – including waivers to Quantitative Performance Criteria (see box), or modifications to conditionalities due to changed economic circumstances such as the onset of a debt crisis. The IMF maintains a public database ('MONA' – or Monitoring of Fund Arrangements) which gathers a lot of data on loan programs and conditionalities since 2002. The independent, civil society managed www.imfmonitor.org is an evolving resource gathering IMF conditionalities dating back to the 1980s and will ultimately also include surveillance documents.

Making sense of loan-related documents

Trawling through a Letter of Intent, a Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies, and/or a Technical Memorandum of Understanding to identify the conditions linked to an IMF loan agreement can be a daunting task. Here's a quick guide to some of the terminology used in these documents to help you make sense of them.

- **Prior actions (PAs)**: policy objectives that a country has to fulfil before the IMF gives its green light to a new loan.
  Example: revision of income tax legislation according to IMF recommendations (Sri Lanka, 2017)
- **Structural benchmarks (SBs)**: reforms to a country's legislation or its economic structure (e.g. eliminating trade barriers) that are not easily quantifiable or measurable but which the IMF considers critical to achieving the objectives of a program. Like ITs, these do not have to be met to keep IMF money flowing, but can often become PAs in future loans/disbursements.
  Example: passing legislation on PPPs and on civil service reform (Tunisia, 2016)
- **Quantitative Performance Criteria (QPCs)**: measurable conditions related to macroeconomic variables (e.g. levels of international reserves) over which a government has influence. Once a loan has been agreed upon, a borrowing country has to meet QPCs to continue borrowing from the fund.
  Example: a limit on how much new external debt a government can build up (Côte d'Ivoire, 2017)
- **Indicative targets (ITs)**: these are quantitative indicators that may be attached to QPCs to help measure whether a borrowing country is meeting the goals of an IMF program. If a country fails to hit these targets, it won't mean they stop receiving IMF funds, but over time, ITs can become QPCs.
  Example: a target for total, annual government revenue (Niger, 2016)

Source: imf.org

Making sense of an Executive Board discussion

Consensus is king in the IMF Executive Board, so votes are avoided as much as possible. But to be able to base decisions on its discussions, meeting summaries (or 'summings up') are intended to capture the 'sense of the meeting'. This is understood to be a 'position supported by Executive Directors having sufficient votes to carry the question if a vote were taken'. The summaries don't include individual ED positions but do try to reflect important differences in their views through the use of particular words or 'qualifiers'. Below are some of the most frequently used and what they reveal about the level of ED agreement on an issue.

Qualifier	Number of EDs
A few	2-4
Some	5-6
A number of	6-9
Many	10-15
Most	15 or more
Significant minority of the Board or, in exceptional cases, required majority or a majority of the Board	Indication of necessary voting strength, particularly useful in cases of special majorities
Directors	Required voting majority would be very comfortably satisfied if there were to be a vote; and all, or almost all, Directors can go along with the majority view.

Source: imf.org

Executive Board documents

Executive Board meetings are not public, and documents and ED positions on specific agenda items (known as 'grays') are not published in advance of meetings. The IMF does later publish some of these via its online archives, but with a considerable time-lag: for Board minutes, there is a delay of 3 years. (This was reduced from five years to three years in 2014: the IMF justifies this delay on the basis of avoiding to disclose economically sensitive data, and to ensure EDs can continue to speak candidly in meetings.)

Public Information Notices (PINs) or press releases summarising key Board discussions are generally released shortly after meetings, and are a key resource to find out what's been decided. As the Board works mainly on a consensus basis, votes are rarely taken, and timely information is not disclosed when these take place. PINs do not reveal individual ED positions (but these are recorded in the full meeting minutes): what information you can discover from a PIN about the level of agreement is often limited to decoding specific phrases that are regularly used in these so-called 'summings up' (see box). This lack of transparency is not helped by the fact that PINs are only published with the consent of the country/countries concerned.

The IMF publishes information online on the topics that will formally be discussed by the Executive Board in the next seven days, along with an archive calendar of past meetings. Monitoring this calendar alone limits the strategic influence a CSO could have on Board discussions, even more so given that agendas for Executive Board meetings tend to be finalised the day before. To get a better idea of the key policy issues that the Board will be looking at, and when, CSOs should review the Board Work Program (published twice a year, and setting out a plan for the next 12 months), which outlines priority issues and a basic timeline for when they will be discussed. IMF watchdog organisations, such as the Bretton Woods Project, often circulate summaries of these work programs to CSO networks, so get in touch with partner organisations for more information.

It's worth remembering that while decisions on the economic situation of (Article IV consultations) or a loan to a specific country tend to be discussed at a single Board meeting – as the Board essentially gives its approval to work already done by the Fund management and staff – policy issues (e.g. reviewing the distribution of voting rights across IMF member countries) may need repeated discussions over a number of months. Keep in touch with the IMF civil society team, specific IMF staff, mission chief and resident representatives, and your respective ED to stay updated with the progress of issues on which you are working.

IMF Policy

The IMFC guides the strategic policy direction of the Fund and issues a public communiqué after each of its biannual meetings. CSOs should regularly review these documents after each Spring and Annual meeting to identify the political direction that the Fund is taking and specific policy commitments: for example, in October 2016, the IMFC explicitly called on the Fund to 'integrate deliverables under the post-2015 development agenda' into its work. Nonetheless, it is important to read the communiqué closely, paying particular attention to the verbs used by the Committee: specific policy recommendations will be signalled in phrases such as '[W]e ***call*** on the IMF to...', while weaker phrases expressing '***support***' or '***welcoming***' initiatives, may signal the limits that the Committee wants to set on how far the Fund should work on an issue, or reflect political differences within the Committee.

Since 2012, the IMF Managing Director has released a Global Policy Agenda (GPA) in advance of each regular IMFC meeting (and by extension, the Spring and Annual Meetings), which draws on the Fund's economic assessments to lay out the challenges facing the global and national economies. The GPA suggests how countries should tackle these problems and what the Fund can do to support them, and is promoted via high-profile public events. This can be read as an effort by the Managing Director to steer policy discussions at the upcoming meetings, and influence strategy. Look out for references to the issues on which you're working, and don't hesitate to draw on the GPA when engaging with IMF staff and EDs during the Springs and Annuals.

Fund staff regularly produce proposals and reports related to how the IMF undertakes its work, known as policy papers. These can range from reviewing how the Fund considers anti-corruption issues in its economic assessments and country programs, to reporting on which countries allow disclosure or not of their loan-related documents. These can often be a good resource to understand IMF operations in detail, and how the Fund considers specific issues (e.g. social protection) in its advice to countries. Depending upon the subject matter, policy papers may be published before they are discussed by the Executive Board.

IMF Monitoring

As a key plank of the institution's work, the IMF produces a large amount of analysis on macroeconomic and financial issues (so-called 'surveillance'). Alongside regular country-specific economic health assessments (Article IV consultations, see above), the Fund also issues regular regional and global assessments such as the flagship *World Economic Outlook*, or the *Fiscal Monitor* which was developed after the global financial crisis to address public finance developments. These documents receive wide media attention, and often reflect strategic IMF research findings, rather than IMF policy per se: for example, the October 2017 Fiscal Monitor focused on income inequality and highlighted the role of public spending on health and education.

The Fund also produces regional analyses: in Europe, these include the *Nordic Regional Report*, the *German-Central European Supply Chain Report*, and *CESEE Regional Economic Issues* for Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe.

In addition to these publications, the IMF maintains a number of datasets on specific economic indicators such as external debt to GDP ratios, and which include its forecasting data linked, for example, to the *World Economic Outlook*.

IMF Research

Volumes of economic research by Fund staff is released each year, and these papers can sometimes put forward more progressive positions than current IMF policy. Reviewing research papers can be useful for your engagement with the institution, and help you to identify key internal allies that could support your advocacy towards the political and operational arms of the Fund. It can also help you to highlight contradictions in what the Fund is doing with respect to what its research is telling it. To illustrate this, it is worth noting that the growing focus on income and gender inequality within the Fund began from within its research department, and continues to filter through to the IMF's surveillance and lending work. This has been pushed by concerted CSO advocacy which has also capitalised strategically on the Fund's own findings. Research formats include Staff Working Papers and Staff Discussion Notes, the latter of which carry more institutional status: but it is important to remember that research is not an Executive Board output, so does not necessarily reflect official IMF policy.

Civil society engagement with the IMF

In the past, CSOs may have found it difficult to engage with the IMF, due, for example, to the technical nature of its work or its lack of decision-making transparency. The Fund has worked to improve its openness to civil society – at the global and national levels – including by establishing a dedicated Civil Society Team within its communications department, and updating staff guidance in 2015 to encourage better exchange with CSOs. It still has much to do to turn best practice into standard practice, but it is important to emphasise that it can be relatively easy to approach and engage with the IMF – provided an organisation has the capacity: in terms of both financial resources and expertise. Maximising your influence requires adopting a campaign perspective, oriented by a specific issue on which the IMF can affect change, and setting out well-defined demands for the Fund. The information below is designed to help you make use of the engagement opportunities available to CSOs in this context.

Engaging at the institutional level

The Civil Society Team

This is a dedicated team of three people within the IMF Communications department, who lead the institution's work on engaging with CSOs and youth. The Head of the Team is the main contact point for CSOs, and can coordinate relations with other parts of the Fund – e.g. transmitting advocacy letters to the most appropriate department, and securing a response, or providing contact details for specific staff. A dedicated civil society website, managed by the Team, also provides information to CSOs on public consultations, key IMF outputs (such as new policies on transparency, or research on inequality), and support for participation at the Annual and Spring Meetings.

It can be useful to work with CSO coalitions and networks to develop a common contribution to a consultation, particularly where the scope of a topic is very wide

Consultations

The IMF operates about three public consultations on major policy issues each year. In recent years, these have included the review of the Fund's debt sustainability framework for low-income countries (2016), or of the loan instruments available to poorer nations (2017). The IMF also organises targeted consultations with specific CSOs working on a particular issue: these organisations are generally selected through outreach by the IMF Civil Society Team to regional networks such as Eurodad or Afrodad, or watchdog organisations such as the Bretton Woods Project, who can disseminate information more widely to specialist groups.

Consultations are an important opportunity to promote civil society positions and engage the Fund in a dialogue on specific aspects of its work: IMF staff often, for example, organise conference calls with CSOs during a consultation, to explain policy issues in more detail, and discuss civil society concerns. Nonetheless, the institution has received criticism about how well it provides follow-up information on the final outcomes of consultations, including on how CSO input has been dealt with.

Often, a consultation topic may seem very technical: it can be useful to work with CSO coalitions and networks to develop a common contribution to a consultation, particularly where the scope of a topic (such as a review of how the IMF conducts its economic monitoring work) is very wide. Contact partner organisations and specialist CSOs to find out whether they are intending to participate in a consultation and how your organisation could contribute. You should also reach out directly to the IMF staff member leading work on the consultation to request a bilateral meeting/call.

CSOs are strongly encouraged to seize the opportunities to contribute to consultations. Further information can be found via the IMF Civil Society webpage.

The Annual and Spring Meetings

The Annual and Spring Meetings (AM/SM) gather together many development finance actors, and for several years a Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF) has been organised in conjunction with the main agenda. The CSPF attracts around 6-700 CSO representatives from around the world, and can be a useful occasion to learn more about the work and priorities of the Fund, network with other CSOs, and meet with Fund staff, government representatives, and other stakeholders.

The CSPF features around 40 thematic CSO side events on development finance issues (see more below), as well as sessions for participants to engage directly with institutional leaders: notably, a Town hall meeting with the IMF Managing Director and World Bank President and roundtable meetings with IMF/WB Executive Directors. These latter meetings do reflect increasing efforts by the institutions to interact with CSO attendees, but in practice they are not guaranteed strategic advocacy opportunities. The current, large scale question and answer format of the Town hall hinders a focused dialogue, while attendance by IMF EDs at the large roundtable meetings is often poor, or delegated to advisors.CSOs are advised to push for one-to-one meetings with their respective EDs, or meetings with regional/constituency groupings of EDs, if aiming for more targeted policy discussions. Indeed, CSOs have found the CSPF to be too separated from the main AM/SM agenda, with few CSO participants in official events or space for their views. Nor does the CSPF allow for any direct CSO engagement with IMF decision-making bodies (e.g. IMFC or Board of Governors).

Media attention on and the political significance of the Annual and Spring Meetings have lessened in recent years, but they can be a useful advocacy moment, if you have identified them as a key lobby and media opportunity within a focused campaign, and have done groundwork in advance. Take advantage of them by arranging one-to-one meetings in advance in the margins of the event (see more below). Aside from this, they are great moments to get up to speed with the latest development finance policy discussions, and the positioning of various actors from governments, to private finance institutions, to other CSOs: be sure therefore to take time away from the CSPF and attend public events in the official agenda!

It's also useful to get in touch with other organisations that are working on the issues that interest you, particularly larger, international CSOs such as Oxfam, to see what they have planned around the Annual and Spring Meetings: e.g. major campaign actions in which you can get involved.

You can find useful background policy material and practical information about the Meetings, on the websites of specialised CSOs and networks, such as Eurodad, the Bretton Woods Project, or the Bank Information Center.

The IMF-World Bank Annual and Spring Meetings

Twice a year, the IMF and World Bank host a week of policy discussions and events on national and global macro-economic issues. The Annual Meetings traditionally take place in September/October, and are anchored around the joint meetings of the Boards of Governors of the two institutions, and the meetings of the IMFC and Development Committee. The two advisory committees also convene at the Spring Meetings. The gatherings take place in Washington DC, where the institutions are headquartered. Every third year, the Annual Meetings are held in a member country outside the USA.

The Annual and Spring Meetings are major events in the global economic and financial calendar, with the Annual Meetings gathering around 13,000 participants in 2017, ranging from government ministers and officials, to representatives from international organisations, financial institutions, the private sector, media, and civil society. The scale of attendance means many country groupings, such as the G7, G20, G24 and G77 also hold meetings during the Annual and Spring Meetings, and like the Fund's advisory committees, use the occasion to issue communiqués setting out key policy priorities. While the main institutional meetings are held behind closed doors, many debates, briefings, or press conferences are organised with high-profile speakers and dealing with topical development finance issues, as part of an official, public programme.

Sources: imf.org; worldbank.org

Advocacy at the Annuals/Springs

Meetings with EDs and IMF staff are perhaps best arranged at times other than the Annuals/Springs. However, repeated advocacy trips to Washington DC may not be a financially viable option for many non-US based CSOs, so it's worth trying to capitalise on the Annuals/Springs to arrange side meetings with key advocacy targets. But remember, while the sheer number of actors participating at the Meetings means your targets may all be in the same place, that doesn't mean they will have the time to meet you: schedules, particularly for EDs, are packed around these times. Here are some tips:

- **Reach out to IMF staff working on your issues**: approach them *well in advance*, to set up face-to-face meetings. This includes country mission chiefs, who are permanently based in Washington DC, so may be particularly interesting if you are from a CSO in an IMF program country. Contact the IMF Civil Society Team if you are unable to find the contact details for specific people, (details of mission chiefs are not made public on the IMF website).

  Think about meeting IMF Research staff that have issued papers on topics of interest to you – such as on the impact of IMF conditionality on social protection, or gender budgeting. *This should complement advocacy towards the political levels of the Fund (e.g. the Executive Board, or Managing Director), rather than replace it.*

- **Don't underestimate your influence**: use the media strategically to highlight your positions in advance, and make sure it is on the IMF's radar. The Fund is notoriously averse to bad press in major outlets, and monitors its press coverage.[10] Consider an 'outsider strategy', particularly if the IMF or government authorities don't seem to be open to dialogue: use the Annuals/Springs for public actions or media stunts and mobilise partner CSOs to participate. It is generally best to first try to approach the Fund directly with your positions, before escalating media work.

- **Reach out to your ED and their advisors**: particularly if you are from a developing country, and link your advocacy at the Annuals/Springs with your advocacy at the national level (see more below.)

- **Reach out to regional EDs/constituency**: often, CSO networks may already be organising regular meetings with regional groupings of EDs – such as the EURIMF-CSO meetings – so get in touch with partner organisations to find out. If no such meetings take place, contact the relevant EDs directly, to propose that these be convened, along with other CSOs from your country/region. If you have established national contacts at finance ministries and central banks working on the IMF, inform them that you are making these contacts and/or holding these meetings, so they are aware that CSOs are monitoring (the country's activities at) the Fund.

Side events

One of the key ways that CSOs participate in the CSPF is by organising a side event, often in cooperation with partner organisations. This might be to launch a new report or research, to hold a panel debate on a specific aspect of IMF policy, or to strategize with other CSOs. The IMF and WB invite proposals for events about two months in advance of the CSPF. They also take care of logistical arrangements meaning that there are no on-site room costs for the CSO. Make sure you sign up on the official WB and IMF CSO webpages, to be alerted when submission periods are open.

Working Group

A CSPF Working Group was established in 2017 with the aim to provide CSOs with greater input into the agenda and format of the CSPF. At the time of writing, terms of reference were still being developed by the group, which gathers eight CSO representatives selected with respect to regional and gender balance. The group will ideally be available to support CSOs engaging with the Forum. (For more information, contact: CSPFWorkingGroup@gmail.com.)

Side events at the Annual and Spring Meetings

If you're considering organising a side event, here are some tips:

Don't expect Fund or government representatives to attend your event just because it's on the CSPF agenda: if you want to use a side event to support advocacy, invite key IMF staff or government officials to attend or speak. Having a Fund panellist at your event can be a good way to get a public IMF response to an issue. But don't use this as a substitute for one-to-one advocacy meetings!

Check what partner organisations have planned: and try to co-sponsor a single event if you're planning similar things (e.g. a panel debate on reforming debt sustainability analyses).

Side events can be really useful to exchange with other CSOs: for instance, if you want to promote a new report or publication. If you want to talk strategy, then a public side event may not be the most ideal forum. Many CSOs use the CSPF to arrange strategy meetings outside the official programme: think about organising a targeted meeting and letting other organisations know.

Manage your expectations, and the media: the CSPF agenda features many events, but few institutional/governmental representatives attend. So before you fly in a high-profile speaker, think about whether the CSPF is the right forum. And if you want media attention for your event, make sure you target journalists beforehand, and circulate information in the media centre when you're at the CSPF.

Don't forget the official programme: if a high-profile representative from your organisation will be attending the Annuals/Springs, try to secure a speaking slot for them on the official seminar programme. Contact the IMF and World Bank in advance – via the Civil Society Teams if necessary – to inform them about your representative and explore the options. Work with other CSOs to lobby.

Engaging at the EU level

SCIMF

European CSOs are invited to attend SCIMF meetings in advance of the Annual Meetings each year, for an exchange of views. Eurodad coordinates these sessions in cooperation with the SCIMF secretariat, proposing agenda items as suggested by CSO colleagues which reflect their key advocacy priorities towards the Fund. It is important here for CSOs to review the Executive Board and SCIMF work programmes to shape their agenda proposals – taking into account the limits of SCIMF influence on an issue – and base their attendance strategically within wider advocacy campaigning.

Once agenda items are agreed by the Chair, the CSOs prepare discussion papers which are circulated to SCIMF members in advance: in the past, the SCIMF Chair has designated each issue to a specific committee member to prepare a response which is delivered at the meeting. This format reduces the scope for broad debate on the issues, limiting the possibility to determine individual country positions or divisions. Nonetheless, given that this is the main coordination mechanism on IMF issues in Brussels, CSO engagement is critical, and Eurodad continues to work with the SCIMF secretariat to improve the effectiveness of the exchange.

Individual CSOs should approach their SCIMF members in advance of these meetings to promote messages, and share information on country positioning. Following the exchange of views, CSOs are encouraged to follow up with their SCIMF representatives and EDs to further influence discussions in Washington.

EURIMF

At the Annual and Spring meetings themselves, CSOs from the Eurodad network and allied organisations hold a regular meeting with EURIMF Executive Directors, chaired by the EURIMF President, and coordinated in cooperation with either Eurodad or the Bretton Woods Project in an alternating CSO liaison role.

Sitting outside the main Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF) agenda, the meetings provide a valuable opportunity for CSOs to raise specific issues directly with the institution's European leadership, and for CSOs to address specific points from the official agenda of the IMFC. The more informal nature of the EURIMF-CSO meeting, and the stability of EURIMF membership, allows for a more interactive discussion than at the SCIMF, and for ongoing advocacy relations to be deepened.

Agenda items are put forward by the CSOs attending, and discussion papers prepared in advance. Differing constituency positions are in greater evidence at the EURIMF, and enable CSOs to target more effectively their follow-up advocacy. Moreover, in contrast to larger civil society-ED meetings convened as part of the official CSPF agenda, the EURIMF meeting allows for a structured discussion and attendance by EDs or their Alternates is generally high.

Top tips for engaging with the SCIMF

- **Find out who your national SCIMF representatives are**: they are normally delegated from both your national ministry of finance and central bank.
- **Get in touch with them to set up a face to face meeting and introduce your organisation**: it's good for them to know that there are CSOs following the SCIMF.
- **Regularly send them your reports/publications**: this helps to keep your dialogue going, and feeds your priorities onto their agenda.
- **Attend the annual SCIMF-CSO meeting** in Brussels if you can – be sure to propose agenda items and contribute with background discussion notes.
- **Follow up** with your national SCIMF members after these meetings and raise issues from your engagement with your SCIMF representatives with your national ED.
- Remember to **review the public IMF Executive Board work program**, and available information on the SCIMF work program to find out what the SCIMF may be discussing: contact organisations such as Eurodad or the Bretton Woods Project who may have more information on this.

Engaging at the national level[11]

There are several key IMF interlocutors that are useful for national level advocacy.

Executive Directors and national representatives

One of the central ways of trying to influence the IMF agenda through the national level, particularly for European CSOs, is to maintain working relations with national/regional EDs and government officials working on IMF issues. Here is some guidance on how to get the most out of your interaction with them.

Get – and stay – informed: monitor Article IV reports, loan agreements, and loan review documents, to know what the IMF is saying to your government. Track government positions on issues of particular importance to your organisation (e.g. on labour rights, or social protection), and whether one party may be more aligned with civil society positions. Read what the IMF is saying about the issues you care about, and try to understand their reasoning and thinking.

Find out who's who: contact your ministry of finance and central bank, and identify key officials that are working on IMF issues. Establish contacts and set up regular meetings. And keep them informed of your interaction with EDs, especially where you are facing challenges.

Promote your work: if your organisation produces publications and research related to IMF activities, send these to relevant government officials and your national/regional ED, to influence the agenda, and ensure they are aware that you are monitoring the issues on which they work.

Have regular meetings with EDs: in some countries, such as the UK and Norway, regular meetings take place with the national/regional ED twice a year. Contact partner CSOs to see if corresponding meetings are taking place in your country, and try to participate. If regular meetings are not taking place, take the initiative to reach out to your national/regional ED's office directly, or through your national finance ministry, to set up meetings with CSOs, trade unions, and other public interest groups. To maximise your impact, try to schedule meetings to influence the IMF work program, rather than only following the Annual and Spring Meeting cycle.

And make them strategic: in advance of your meetings, provide your ED with discussion papers laying out your positions. And don't forget to consult the IMF Executive Board work program, to propose agenda topics that are strategically linked with what the Board will actually be discussing rather than issues that IMF staff are focused on.

But remember, meetings should be a two-way thing: use the meetings to gather information and intelligence, as well as presenting your organisation's points of view. Try to find out how your ED's position fits with other EDs, or with IMF policy, and any other relevant information on IMF policy priorities and developments. And don't forget to ask what the IMF needs from CSOs: *this is to tailor better your advocacy materials, not to get the IMF to set your priorities!*

Timing is important: if there is media attention on a certain issue – and particularly if this is directed squarely at the IMF – seize this opportunity to address related concerns to the Fund including via your ED. For example, the exposure of hidden loans in a country could be a good moment to address the Fund's approach to measuring transparency and responsible financing rules. And keep an eye on the Executive Board work program, to monitor when a particular policy issue is to be discussed, and time your outreach accordingly.

NB: if you want to discuss specific, country-related issues, such as how a loan program is impacting health spending in a country, it can often be more useful to contact your ED between Annual and Spring meetings, rather than at the events themselves.

Work in coalition: identify other CSOs or public interest groups who are working on IMF issues in your country/region, and get in touch to share information and explore opportunities to work together. Sign up to listservs/mailing lists coordinated by the Bretton Woods Project, Eurodad, and other networks to stay informed of IMF activities, and to share your own work.

Use the media: reach out to journalists and media outlets to raise attention on the work of the IMF. As mentioned before, the IMF is sensitive to bad press.

Resident representatives and/or regional offices

IMF country offices are located in many countries, headed by a 'resident representative' leading a team of around 4-5 people at most. Six regional offices also play a liaison role with national governments and stakeholders. Resident representatives are the main contact points for national CSOs, and are meant to engage actively with them to ensure they are included in IMF country visits to prepare Article IV reports, and receive relevant information on IMF activities. Get in touch with your relevant representative to feed into surveillance missions, and find out about pending loan agreements, technical assistance to your country, and public consultations.

Contact details for resident representatives/country offices can be found on country-specific pages on the IMF website, and in Article IV reports. Note that IMF offices are, however, located in only 6 EU states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, and Romania), however an IMF Europe Office, housed in Paris and Brussels, is meant to serve European CSOs, as well as engaging with the EU institutions and national governments.

Mission chiefs

Country mission chiefs are designated for each member country, but are based in IMF headquarters in Washington DC. They lead negotiations with a member country when the IMF is hammering out a loan agreement – and related conditionality – or preparing an Article IV report, for example, and will steer the priorities of an IMF visit to a country ('mission'). As such, they hold more policy influence than a resident representative. Indeed, for surveillance work, they generally make decisions which then just get approved by the Executive Board, while for lending decisions, EDs tend to be much more engaged with specific policies.

A mission chief will normally visit a country 2-3 times a year, so CSOs should use these occasions to meet with them, in order to influence IMF policy advice or obligations being transmitted to a government. It is advisable that CSOs push strongly for these meetings, and it can be useful to work in coalition with other CSOs working on issues including human rights, tax justice, or trade unions, to secure meetings during missions. The resident representative should be able to provide information about when these visits are happening. CSOs attending the Annual or Spring Meetings should also aim to set up meetings with mission chiefs while in Washington DC.

There is less transparency over who mission chiefs are, and the IMF does not publish their contact details on its website. You may be able to find their surnames, followed by the text '(Head)', in Article IV reports or loan agreement reviews: this is normally buried in information in the Executive Summary on who took part in preparing the document. You can also contact the IMF Civil Society Team to ask for their contact details, and those of other IMF staff working on a particular country.

Key sources of information

Afrodad	http://www.afrodad.org
Arab NGO Network for Development	http://www.annd.org/english/index.php
Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development	http://www.apmdd.org
Bank Information Center	http://www.bankinformationcenter.org
Bretton Woods Project (BWP)	http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org
BWP explainer on IMF document categories	http://bit.ly/2D5aVQn
Country letters of intent, and other policy documents linked to IMF lending	http://bit.ly/2EKXfMi
Debt and Development Coalition Ireland	https://www.debtireland.org
Development Committee communiqués	http://bit.ly/2oM8k9I
Erlassjahr.de (Jubilee Germany)	http://erlassjahr.de
EU Economic and Financial Committee	http://bit.ly/2FirFpk
Eurodad	http://www.eurodad.org
IMFC communiqués	http://bit.ly/2I6PRNf
IMF Civil Society page	http://bit.ly/2HbU9Sh
IMF contact information	http://bit.ly/2tn9Ow5
IMF country quotas, voting power, and governors	http://bit.ly/LsABvm
IMF Data	http://bit.ly/2FqDyNr
IMF Debt Sustainability Analyses for low-income countries	http://bit.ly/2tnKJRA
IMF debt sustainability risk ratings for low-income countries	http://bit.ly/2oicvdb
IMF Executive Board calendar	http://bit.ly/1i4ISjh
IMF Executive Board documents archive	http://bit.ly/2towsEq
IMF Executive Directors and voting power	http://bit.ly/2I6OcqZ
IMF Monitor (independent database on IMF conditionality)	http://imfmonitor.org
IMF resident representatives and regional offices	http://bit.ly/2I7n0Zg
IMF senior officials	http://bit.ly/1uwW32V
Jubilee Debt Campaign UK	http://jubileedebt.org.uk
Jubilee USA Network	http://www.jubileeusa.org
Latindadd	https://www.latindadd.org
SLUG (Debt Justice Norway)	http://www.slettgjelda.no/en
UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights	http://bit.ly/25B6lTk

Endnotes

1 For further reading and sources, see, Robert Naiman and Neil Watkins, A Survey of the Impacts of IMF Structural Adjustment in Africa: Growth, Social Spending, and Debt Relief, (Center for Economic and Policy Research: April 1999) available at http://bit.ly/2BN0aFF;, Carmen Reinhart and Christoph Trebesch, The International Monetary Fund: 70 Years of Reinvention, (HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series: December 2015);, Joseph Stiglitz, "The Asian Crisis 10 years later", The Guardian, 2 July 2007, available at http://bit.ly/2yHtqtJ, Martin A. Weiss, International Monetary Fund: Background and Issues for Congress, (Congressional Research Service: Washington DC, July 2014), available at http://bit.ly/2kotVAU and www.imf.org.

2 The SDR is an international reserve currency established by the IMF to supplement member countries' international reserves. Its value is based on a basket of currencies: the US dollar, the euro, the Japanese yen, the British pound and the Chinese renminbi/yuan. For more information, see http://bit.ly/2omUhHL

3 See Knud Erik Jørgensen, Katie Verlin Laatikainen (eds.), Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions, (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), pg. 225.

4 For a comprehensive overview of understanding and accessing IMF documents, see Global Transparency Initiative, Transparency at the IMF, (London: October 2007), available at http://bit.ly/2EZOvFq. Information in that guide has been drawn on here. Further sources include www.imf.org and Alexander Mountford, IEO Background Paper: The Formal Governance Structure of the IMF, (IMF: March 2008).

5 The 2017 IMF report on disclosure of Article IV reports indicates that 100% of reports concerning low-income countries were published in 2016, compared to a 96% publication rate across all member countries. See http://bit.ly/2CeK6gL

6 'Countries are eligible for inclusion in the PRGT-eligibility list if their annual Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is below the IDA operational cut-off (US$1,215 for FY 2015) and if they do not have access to international financial markets on a durable and substantial basis'. From http://bit.ly/2HD0TJL. The list of PRGT-eligible countries is reviewed every two years. At the time of writing, 70 countries are on the list, which was most recently reviewed in May 2017. For the full list of countries' DSA status, see http://bit.ly/2oicvdb

7 For more information, see http://bit.ly/2CcfTPB

8 See, for example, Jesse Griffiths and Konstantinos Todoulos, Conditionally yours, (Eurodad: April 2014), available at http://bit.ly/2GB4iHY

9 See http://bit.ly/2EKXfMi. Country-related surveillance and lending documents are published with the consent of the country concerned. The Fund now names and shames those countries that object to or delay disclosure in an annual report on transparency trends: the 2017 report is available at http://bit.ly/2CeK6gL

10 In January 2018, for example, a critical piece in the UK Guardian by Jihan Chandoul of the Tunisian Observatory of Economy, highlighted the adverse social impact of IMF-imposed economic reforms in Tunisia. This quickly prompted an official reaction from the Fund. See here http://bit.ly/2Flv9Is and here http://bit.ly/2opO50R

11 This guide does not focus on CSO engagement at the national level within an IMF program. A useful resource in this respect is BIC & New Rules for Global Finance, Understanding & Influencing IMF Policy Advice in Myanmar, (Washington DC: April 2016), available at http://bit.ly/2Fn41J5.

Eurodad

The European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad) is a network of 46 civil society organisations (CSOs) from 19 European countries, which works for transformative yet specific changes to global and European policies, institutions, rules and structures to ensure a democratically controlled, environmentally sustainable financial and economic system that works to eradicate poverty and ensure human rights for all.

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