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**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

**Report on the Implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in
Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance**

DAC Meeting, 18 September 2026

This document presents, in its Annex A, the Report on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)] (hereafter, the “implementation Report”), including on the implementation of its substantive provisions, its dissemination and its continued relevance, in light of the fifth anniversary of its adoption in 2026. The Report also includes conclusions on whether the Recommendation requires revision or whether further actions to support its dissemination and implementation are necessary.

The implementation Report, set out in Annex A, builds on responses to two questionnaires submitted by Adherents to the DAC Recommendation and to civil society organisations (through the DAC CSO Reference Group), as well as preliminary consultations with and written inputs from the DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society (CoP) in early June, July and August 2026.

The text of the implementation Report was adjusted to reflect a factual correction requested by one Adherent.

The Report was approved and declassified by the DAC at its meeting on 18 September 2026, and published on the [online Compendium of OECD legal instruments](#).

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1. This document presents, in its Annex A, the Report by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)] (hereafter “DAC Recommendation”), including on the implementation of its substantive provisions, its dissemination and its continued relevance. The implementation Report also includes conclusions on whether the DAC Recommendation requires revision or whether further actions to support its dissemination and implementation are necessary.
2. Following discussions at its meeting on 18 September 2026, the DAC approved and declassified the Report. The Report is available on the [online Compendium of OECD legal instruments](#).

1. Background

3. The DAC Recommendation was adopted by the DAC on 6 July 2021, making it the first international standard focusing on the role of providers which is dedicated to strengthening civil society’s contribution to the 2030 Agenda, the pledge to leave no one behind, inclusive sustainable development, effective humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and democracy. It is founded on a recognition of the diversity within civil society and seeks to enable civil society actors not only as providers’ implementing partners, but also as independent development and humanitarian actors in their own right. The DAC Recommendation builds on the premise that providers should seek to enable an inclusive and independent civil society, especially in partner countries or territories to which development co-operation is aimed.
4. The DAC Recommendation rests on three mutually reinforcing Pillars: respecting, protecting and promoting civic space; supporting and engaging with civil society; and incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability. These Pillars are seen as complementary, as all three must be addressed in a coherent manner in order to enable civil society to maximise its contributions to inclusive sustainable development, humanitarian assistance and democracy. While the DAC Recommendation primarily targets the policies and practices of DAC members and other providers, the inclusion of the third Pillar recognises the shared responsibility for enabling civil society, as civil society actors also have a role to play in enhancing their own effectiveness, transparency and accountability.
5. Since its adoption, the environment for civil society has grown more challenging, especially over the past year. Human rights and fundamental freedoms face mounting threats worldwide amid rising political polarisation, growing scepticism about the legitimacy and value of development co-operation, and declining trust in both CSOs and public institutions. Reduced ODA and shifting policy priorities among DAC members have further limited funding for civic space, compounded by heightened scrutiny of CSOs in partner and provider countries alike. Meanwhile, expanding digital surveillance and mis- and disinformation campaigns targeting civil society have deepened public distrust and further narrowed its operating space.
6. Under provision IX c. of the DAC Recommendation [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)], the DAC committed to developing a report on its implementation no later than five years after its adoption. Accordingly, the implementation Report, set out in Annex A, has been developed for the DAC Recommendation’s five-year mark in 2026. The implementation Report assesses Adherents’ progress in implementing the DAC Recommendation’s 28 provisions, evaluates dissemination efforts by both Adherents and the Secretariat, and

considers the DAC Recommendation's continued relevance, proposing possible actions going forward.

2. Methodology

7. The primary source of information for this implementation Report is a questionnaire circulated to the 33 Adherents¹ to the DAC Recommendation in the third quarter of 2025 (hereafter "Adherent questionnaire"), which received a total of 27 responses (hereafter "Adherent Respondents"). The Adherent questionnaire included questions addressing self-reported progress on the implementation of each of the DAC Recommendation's 28 provisions, as well as on overall challenges faced in implementing each Pillar of the DAC Recommendation. It also included questions on Adherents' efforts to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, on its continued relevance, and on recent developments and priorities for the future.

8. To complement the evidence gathered from the Adherent questionnaire, a questionnaire was circulated to civil society organisations (CSOs) in the last quarter of 2025 (hereafter "CSO questionnaire"), which received a total of 39 responses (hereafter "CSO Respondents"). The CSO questionnaire was shared with the CSO Reference Group (CSO RG) and with other CSOs via the DAC Community of Practice (CoP) on Civil Society. The CSO questionnaire included questions on CSOs' perception of DAC members' implementation of each Pillar of the DAC Recommendation, as well as on their perception of challenges and opportunities faced by DAC members which might impact progress in implementation. Similarly to the Adherent questionnaire, the CSO questionnaire included questions on CSOs' efforts to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, its continued relevance and recent developments and priorities for the future.

9. Additional sources of information were used to complement the results from the Adherent and CSO questionnaires. These include DAC Peer Reviews, implementation toolkits published since 2023, DAC statistics on official development assistance (ODA) to and through CSOs, and a series of oral and written consultations on the implementation Report held with Adherents, CSOs and other stakeholders between mid-2025 and mid-2026.

¹ At the time of the preparation of the implementation Report, the Adherents to the DAC Recommendation are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic ("Czechia"), Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Following the circulation of the Adherents' questionnaire, Romania joined the DAC as an Associate and adhered to the DAC Recommendation on 17 December 2025. Romania did not participate in the data collection for the purposes of this implementation Report, which concentrates on the period from the adoption of the DAC Recommendation to December 2025, i.e. before Romania's adherence to the DAC Recommendation.

3. Process

10. The development of this implementation Report drew on responses submitted by Adherents and CSOs to both of the questionnaires, as well as on various consultations held with Adherents, CSOs and other development actors during the OECD DAC Civil Society Days (CSDs) in June 2025; the CoP meetings of June 2025, November 2025 and May 2026; and a virtual consultation held in February 2026. During the March 2026 DAC meeting, the Secretariat delivered an update to the DAC on the development of the draft implementation Report. Consultations held during the November 2025 CoP meeting, the February 2026 virtual consultation and the March 2026 DAC meeting allowed participants to discuss **preliminary trends** emerging from questionnaire responses and provide additional insights to be considered in the analysis.

11. Consultations held at the May 2026 CoP meeting allowed participants to provide feedback on a **preliminary outline** of the implementation Report (focusing on the substantive analysis and examples of best practices) and provide additional inputs for consideration. This preliminary outline was shared on 21 May 2026 with CoP members and the CSO RG. Based on feedback received, on 26 June 2026, an updated draft was shared with the CoP and CSO RG, as well as with additional CSO Respondents and participants of the February 2026 virtual consultation and May 2026 CoP meeting.

12. On this basis, the CoP and CSO RG were invited to provide feedback on a **zero draft** of the implementation Report in early August 2026 before formal submission to the DAC. The **final** implementation Report, set out in the Annex A, takes account of this feedback.

13. Following discussions at its meeting on 18 September 2026, the DAC approved and declassified the Report. The Report is available on the [online Compendium of OECD legal instruments](#).

4. Summary

14. Five years since the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, Adherents have made real advances, in both policy and practice, towards enabling civil society. These efforts have helped embed civil society and civic space considerations more systematically within development co-operation systems. At the same time, significant challenges continue to constrain effective implementation.

15. Both Adherent and CSO Respondents concluded that the DAC Recommendation continues to serve as a key guiding framework and reference point for strengthening policies and practices in support of civil society. Respondents offered suggestions to enhance its implementation and dissemination in the coming years and reaffirmed its continued relevance. Several noted that current challenges make the DAC Recommendation even more critical today.

4.1. Implementation

16. Overall, Adherents have made progress in implementing the DAC Recommendation by strengthening strategies, expanding dialogue mechanisms, and improving funding approaches for civil society. However, a persistent gap remains between policy commitments and implementation, driven by declining ODA budgets, shifting political priorities, an increasingly restrictive environment for civic space and continued structural barriers limiting effective engagement and collaboration with CSOs.

Pillar 1: Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space

17. **Adherent Respondents demonstrated sustained commitment to protecting civic space through the adoption of policy positions, the strengthening of dialogue mechanisms and enhanced co-ordination.** All Adherents responding to the questionnaire reported adopting or maintaining policy positions that recognise the value of civil society and civic space. These positions are most commonly reflected in strategies, funding instruments, dialogue mechanisms and guidelines that embed civic space and civil society considerations within development co-operation systems. Dialogue with partner-country governments and public-awareness-raising efforts have generally been maintained or increased, with many Adherent Respondents placing greater emphasis on engaging marginalised groups and promoting the participation of partner-country CSOs, including through institutionalised consultation mechanisms. Adherent Respondents also reported progress in strengthening co-ordination through multilateral and regional platforms, reinforcing the “do no harm” principle through more systematic risk assessments and context analyses, and supporting civil society participation in public policy processes, including in the digital sphere and through engagement with independent media.

18. **Persistent implementation gaps, shrinking resources and an increasingly restrictive civic space underscore the need for more proactive and co-ordinated action.** A widening gap between policy positions and effective implementation persists. Reductions in ODA and shifting political priorities have constrained funding for civic space and led to the closure of key co-ordination mechanisms, limiting Adherents’ capacity to take preventive action and increasing reliance on reactive responses to civic space restrictions. CSO-led monitoring indicates that civic space continues to deteriorate across both provider and partner countries, driven by increasingly restrictive legislation, including foreign-agent laws, expanding digital surveillance and the spread of disinformation. These trends have weakened the operational capacity of CSOs and made it more challenging for Adherents to support civil society in restrictive environments, in some instances requiring adaptations to support modalities to uphold the “do no harm” principle. In this context, CSOs emphasised the need for Adherents to adopt more proactive approaches, including by making greater use of CSO-led early-warning data to inform engagement and strengthen the protection of civic space. CSOs also highlighted that sustained reductions in support to civil society risk further constraining civic space by undermining civil society’s ability to defend human rights, pursue accountability and contribute to sustainable development. Addressing these challenges will require strengthening the strategic narrative on the value of civil society, making more systematic use of early-warning data, broadening engagement with the private sector and reinforcing co-ordination to address digital threats and support independent media.

Pillar 2: Supporting and engaging with civil society

19. **Adherent Respondents have strengthened policies and strategies as well as funding approaches to support and engage with civil society.** A majority of Adherent Respondents reported establishing or maintaining policies and strategies for engaging with civil society, most of which were developed in consultation with CSOs. Efforts to promote civil society participation throughout policy and programme cycles have generally increased, with some Adherent Respondents moving towards more structured, institutionalised engagement mechanisms and stronger alignment with international standards, particularly in relation to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus and prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). Adherent Respondents also reported improvements in funding modalities, including the expansion of multi-year partnerships and more flexible funding by some Adherents, efforts to better

promote the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries, and initiatives to streamline administrative processes and enhance transparency.

20. Persistent implementation challenges, declining resources and unequal access to funding continue to limit meaningful civil society engagement and localisation.

Despite this progress, implementation remains uneven and is increasingly constrained by declining ODA. Funding reductions have significantly weakened the operational capacity of CSOs globally, forcing many organisations to scale back or cease operations altogether, with particularly severe impacts on CSOs working on human rights and civic space. Although efforts to reduce administrative burdens and expand participation mechanisms have progressed, they continue to disproportionately disadvantage smaller and partner-country CSOs. In the context of ongoing budget cuts, there is a growing risk that progress since 2021 in improving funding modalities may be reversed, with a return to shorter-term, more rigid and project-based funding aligned to immediate provider priorities. CSOs further noted that participation remains largely ad hoc and more accessible to provider-country and international CSOs than to partner-country CSOs, while funding continues to be predominantly short-term and earmarked, undermining organisational sustainability and local leadership. They call for stronger risk-sharing between providers and CSOs, a reassessment of the role of intermediaries and an extension of the “do no harm” principle to decisions regarding funding reductions. Looking ahead, further action will be required to protect and improve both the quality and quantity of funding, expand direct funding to advance localisation, simplify administrative requirements, institutionalise participation and consultation mechanisms, and broaden partnerships with non-DAC actors and the private sector.

Pillar 3: Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability

21. Adherent Respondents have improved standards, capacity strengthening and partnership approaches to promote CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

Adherent Respondents have broadly maintained or strengthened efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability, notably through the institutionalisation of standards such as codes of conduct, contractual requirements, and safeguards related to human rights, gender equality and SEAH prevention. Many Adherent Respondents reported moderate or significant increases in support for mutual capacity strengthening through dedicated funding, long-term partnerships, peer-learning initiatives, and consortium-based approaches, with several introducing requirements for the participation of partner-country CSOs in consortia while also streamlining reporting and administrative processes. Adherent Respondents also reported expanded efforts to promote participatory and rights-based approaches, strengthened co-ordination among CSOs and support for innovation, alongside greater engagement with CSO networks and platforms as intermediaries for accountability, knowledge-sharing and learning.

22. Compliance-focused approaches, risk aversion and burdensome requirements continue to constrain equitable partnerships and locally led development with civil society.

Despite these advances, further progress is needed to ensure that accountability systems better reflect the diversity and priorities of civil society. Accountability frameworks remain largely compliance-driven with limited recognition of CSO-led accountability frameworks. Furthermore, capacity strengthening tends to serve providers’ reporting needs rather than CSO priorities, and smaller and partner-country CSOs continue to struggle to meet providers’ accountability requirements. A persistent risk-averse institutional culture among providers contributes to a favouring of established international and provider-country CSOs, with rigid audit and compliance requirements disproportionately burdening smaller and partner-country CSOs. Reciprocal accountability

also requires further progress, particularly with regard to providers' accountability towards CSOs, local actors and affected populations. Looking ahead, further action is required to expand flexible, multi-year and core funding to strengthen institutional capacity, adopt more proportionate and context-sensitive approaches to risk management, increase recognition of CSO-led accountability standards, and reform funding modalities and intermediary roles to enable more equitable partnerships and advance localisation.

4.2. Dissemination

23. **Adherent Respondents and the Secretariat have expanded dissemination efforts, increasing awareness of the DAC Recommendation among key stakeholders.**

A majority of Adherent Respondents reported undertaking dissemination initiatives targeting staff across development co-operation, humanitarian and peacebuilding agencies, primarily through internal webpages, workshops and training sessions. Some Adherent Respondents have also extended engagement to external audiences through public webinars and social media, often in collaboration with the Secretariat. The Secretariat has played a central role in promoting the DAC Recommendation through the CoP on Civil Society, as well as by developing multilingual communication materials and conducting outreach through newsletters and international events. These efforts have helped establish the DAC Recommendation as an important reference framework among technical experts and civil society focal points.

24. **Despite these efforts, dissemination remains concentrated within expert communities, highlighting the need for broader and more systematic engagement.**

Dissemination remains uneven, with awareness of the DAC Recommendation largely concentrated within Adherents' civil society units and headquarter-based staff. Outreach to partner-country CSOs, non-DAC providers and multilateral institutions has also remained limited, relying predominantly on one-off events rather than sustained engagement or systematic integration into operational guidance. Further action by both Adherents and the Secretariat will be required to broaden dissemination beyond headquarters to field-level staff and partner-country governments, leverage CSO networks as partners in dissemination, develop more accessible communication materials, and deepen the Secretariat's engagement across a wider range of institutional and geographic contexts.

4.3. Continued relevance

25. **Adherent and CSO Respondents continue to regard the DAC Recommendation as a highly relevant framework for supporting civil society in an increasingly challenging operating environment characterised by shrinking civic space, declining ODA and evolving development co-operation priorities.**

All Adherent and CSO Respondents concluded that its provisions remain relevant, highlighting its role as a valuable framework for enabling civil society, fostering dialogue between providers and CSOs and advancing locally led development (LLD). Most Adherent Respondents reported that the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose and has informed the development of new strategies, policies, programmes, funding guidelines and approaches to engagement, with many identifying it as an important reference point for internal policy reforms. CSO Respondents similarly recognised its value in establishing common standards and strengthening the narrative around civil society as an independent development actor, while also noting moderate improvements in areas such as consultation, participation and access to support.

26. **Sustained implementation challenges highlight the need for further guidance, wider dissemination and more practical support for implementation.**

and CSO Respondents emphasised that implementation has been constrained by budgetary pressures, limited institutional awareness and insufficient progress on more ambitious reforms, particularly in relation to funding modalities, compliance requirements and risk sharing, among others. Both sets of Respondents called for more and stronger implementation support, including clearer prioritisation of key actions, targeted, practical and context-sensitive guidance such as toolkits and/or policy briefs, expanded dissemination and awareness-raising efforts, stronger engagement with partner-country governments and CSOs as well as with other development co-operation providers, and a more robust evidence base demonstrating the developmental and economic value of an enabled and independent civil society sector.

5. Next steps

27. In light of the above, to further support implementation and dissemination of the DAC Recommendation, the DAC is invited to:

- a) discuss, approve and declassify the draft implementation Report set out in Annex A;
- b) encourage Adherents to:
 - i) continue strengthening dissemination and uptake of this DAC Recommendation, including across Adherents' line ministries and beyond headquarters through engagement with partner-country level staff, partner-country governments, CSOs and external actors, including non-DAC providers, multilateral organisations, philanthropy and the private sector; and
 - ii) continue efforts to implement the DAC Recommendation by addressing the main challenges identified in the Summary and Conclusions section of this implementation Report, including through staff training, programme design, internal guidance, further collaboration with CSOs, and the development of context-sensitive approaches for applying this DAC Recommendation in diverse environments;
- c) with the support of the CoP on Civil Society:
 - i) support Adherents in addressing implementation challenges identified in the Summary and Conclusions section of this implementation Report, including through continued analysis, peer learning, dissemination of knowledge, monitoring progress, and support for the development of practical guidance and tools on priority themes;
 - ii) leverage the CoP on Civil Society as the primary platform for mutual learning, peer exchange and practical implementation support, facilitating the sharing of lessons learned, good practices and partner-country experiences, and fostering collaboration among Adherents, CSOs and other development actors; and
 - iii) develop a report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation in five years.

Annex A. Report on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICS	Italian Agency for Development Co-operation
AML	Anti-money laundering
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
Camões	Portuguese Institute for Cooperation and Language
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CoP	Community of Practice
CPAG	CSO Policy Advisory Group (Canada)
CSDs	Civil Society Days
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSO RG	CSO Reference Group
CTF	Counter-terrorism financing
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCD	Development Co-operation Directorate
DDI	Digital Democracy Initiative
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia, Ireland)
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FBO	Faith-based organisation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (United Kingdom)
Fingo	Finnish Development NGOs umbrella organisation
FRA	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCE	Global citizenship education
GCTI	Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative (Canada)

GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation (Germany)
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HRBA	Human rights-based approaches
HRD	Human rights defender
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
KOICA	Korea International Co-operation Agency
LDC	Least developed country
LLD	Locally led development
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Czechia, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania)
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCSD	Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development
PGC	Public Governance Committee
PPT	PowerPoint
PSEAH	Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
RBM	Results-based management
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment
TED	Team Europe Democracy
UN	United Nations
WRO	Women's rights organisation

Report on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance

1. Background

1.1. Origin and scope of the DAC Recommendation

1. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)] (hereafter “DAC Recommendation”) emerged from a growing recognition of the central role that civil society plays in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in supporting inclusive, democratic and sustainable development outcomes (OECD, 2021^[1]). The 2030 Agenda explicitly calls for the engagement of civil society actors in the localisation, implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evidence gathered by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD), including the 2018 *Development Co-operation Report* chapter on civil society and leaving no one behind (OECD, 2018^[2]), the 2020 *DAC Members and Civil Society* study (OECD, 2020^[3]), and the 2020 Foresight Policy Paper *Digital Transformation and the Futures of Civic Space to 2030* (OECD, 2020^[4]), as well as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) *Making Development Co-operation More Effective: 2019 Progress Report* (OECD/UNDP, 2019^[5]), demonstrated both the critical contributions of civil society actors to sustainable development and the persistent challenges they face. These include shrinking civic space, effectiveness gaps in providers’ support to and engagement with civil society, and shortcomings in civil society’s own effectiveness and accountability. These challenges became even more visible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the essential role of civil society in response, recovery and resilience, while highlighting the need for stronger, more coherent support from providers.

2. Against this backdrop, DAC members recognised the need for a dedicated policy instrument to guide and strengthen their approaches to engaging with and enabling civil society. As a forum bringing together many of the world’s largest development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers, the DAC is uniquely positioned to set standards and provide leadership in this area. The DAC Recommendation was therefore conceived as a flexible yet ambitious framework to support, guide and incentivise DAC members and other providers to improve their policies and practices. It aims to promote greater coherence across institutions and governments, while encouraging behaviour change among providers in how they address civic space and work with civil society actors. At the same time, it underscores that civil society actors themselves have responsibilities to strengthen their effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

3. The development of the DAC Recommendation followed an inclusive, iterative and consultative process. Building on a specific action point from the *DAC Members and Civil Society* study (OECD, 2020^[3]), the DAC agreed in June 2020 to initiate work towards a policy instrument, mandating the Secretariat to work closely with the DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society (hereafter “CoP on Civil Society”, or “CoP”). An initial draft was subsequently circulated in advance of the November 2020 DAC High Level Meeting, where DAC members formally committed to developing a DAC policy instrument on

enabling civil society. Multiple draft versions were produced between 2020 and 2021, informed by extensive consultations at formal and informal DAC meetings and with the CoP on Civil Society, the DAC-Civil Society Organisation Reference Group (CSO RG)², DAC subsidiary bodies and other DAC informal groups, such as the DAC Informal Reference Group on Effective Development Co-operation, the DAC Network on Governance (GovNet), the DAC External Relations Group, as well as other relevant OECD policy communities and the GPEDC through its Action Area 2.4 on civil society partnerships. A consultation with the Public Governance Committee's (PGC) Working Party on Open Government was also carried out. Finally, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Secretariat was also consulted.

4. Consultation with DAC-member, international and partner-country civil society organisations (CSOs) from within and beyond the CSO RG was critical throughout the process, as was DAC members' direct consultation with CSOs in their countries. Input was also received from the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), together with the Trade Union Development Co-operation Network (ITUC-TUDCN). The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) specifically contributed input from humanitarian CSOs' perspective. The process ensured that a wide range of perspectives, from both provider and civil society communities, were reflected in the final design. There was broad consensus among both DAC members and CSOs in favour of adopting the instrument in the form of a DAC Recommendation, recognising its ability to combine political commitment with operational flexibility.

5. The evidence-gathering and consultation process culminated in the 2021 OECD DAC Civil Society Days (CSDs), held virtually in June 2021. The CSDs generated further momentum and galvanised support for what was then a draft DAC policy instrument on enabling civil society, which was then submitted to the DAC for possible adoption as a Recommendation in July 2021.

6. The DAC Recommendation was adopted on 6 July 2021, marking an important milestone for the DAC and the OECD. It is the first international standard that is specific to enabling civil society to maximise its contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as to inclusive sustainable development, effective humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and strengthening democracy. Adherents broke new ground by committing to the DAC Recommendation's three mutually reinforcing Pillars:

1. respecting, protecting and promoting civic space;
2. supporting and engaging with civil society; and
3. incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

7. As a non-legally binding instrument, the DAC Recommendation captures shared policy approaches and good practices, while allowing Adherents to tailor implementation to their specific legal, institutional and policy contexts. Its adoption represents a strong political signal and reinforces the DAC's leadership role in promoting enabling environments for civil society. It also establishes a reference framework not only for DAC members but also for non-DAC providers and other development actors that may seek to align with its provisions, as well as for CSOs that may seek to follow it.

² The DAC CSO RG is a self-governing CSO platform, the Secretariat of which co-ordinates and facilitates CSO engagement with the DAC to implement the Framework for Dialogue between the DAC and CSOs. Members of the CSO Reference Group also organise themselves in thematic working groups that engage with the DAC and Secretariat on key areas of mutual interest. One such working group focuses on the DAC Recommendation.

8. A distinguishing feature and added value of the DAC Recommendation is the complementarity across the three Pillars. Evidence-gathering, discussions and consultations in the process of its development illustrated that each Pillar affects the other. In other words, addressing any one aspect of the enabling environment for civil society requires working on the three complementary Pillars together. And while primarily targeting policy and practice change among DAC members and other providers, inclusion of the third Pillar in the DAC Recommendation underscores that there is a shared responsibility for enabling civil society, with civil society actors also needing to enhance their effectiveness and accountability. Further, the DAC Recommendation is underpinned by a recognition of the diversity among civil society actors and the varied roles they play.

9. The DAC Recommendation recognised the CoP on Civil Society as the primary forum for peer learning, providing a source of mutual, practical support to each other's and other Adherents' implementation efforts. In line with this role, in December 2021 a roadmap of priority actions was developed and supported by the CoP to reach the following objectives: 1) disseminate the DAC Recommendation; 2) implement the DAC Recommendation with support from the OECD Secretariat; and 3) assess progress of the DAC Recommendation's implementation. Embedded in the DAC Recommendation is the agreement of the DAC to develop a report to assess progress made in its implementation, dissemination and continued relevance no later than five years after its adoption (hereafter "implementation Report" or "Report").

10. Since then, and in line with the priority actions, the OECD Secretariat has provided policy analysis, technical guidance and support, and facilitated peer learning among Adherents for disseminating and implementing the provisions of the DAC Recommendation in collaboration with the CoP on Civil Society. Throughout this process, the Secretariat and the CoP have worked closely with the CSO RG. The Secretariat has also regularly reported to the DAC on progress made in disseminating, implementing and reviewing the DAC Recommendation, notably in March 2023 [DCD/DAC(2023)15/FINAL], February 2025 [DCD/DAC(2025)9] and March 2026 [DCD/DAC(2026)8].

1.2. Developments in the field since the adoption of the DAC Recommendation

11. The DAC Recommendation was adopted in July 2021 with the recognition that civil society faces complex and interconnected challenges from shrinking civic space and less-than-effective modes of provider support for and dialogue with civil society, to the need for stronger accountability within civil society itself.

12. Since its adoption, the environment for civil society has become increasingly challenging, particularly over the past year. Threats to human rights and fundamental freedoms are worsening across the world. These pressures are unfolding against a backdrop of rising political polarisation, growing public criticism of the legitimacy and value of development co-operation, and declining trust in CSOs as well as in public institutions. At the same time, reductions in official development assistance (ODA) and shifts in policy priorities across DAC member countries have also reduced the availability of funding dedicated to civic space and civil society. This trend has been compounded by heightened scrutiny of CSOs in both partner and provider countries. In parallel, the proliferation of digital surveillance and mis- and disinformation campaigns targeting civil society have accelerated, exacerbating public mistrust and further constraining the operating environment of civil society.

13. This evolving context is reflected throughout this implementation Report, the findings of which highlight two distinct periods. The first covers the four years following

the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, marked by progress in specific areas alongside persistent challenges. The second period covers the year 2025, immediately preceding this implementation Report, marked by a different set of constraints and new areas of opportunity.

14. In this shifting development landscape, Adherent and CSO Respondents to the questionnaires informing this Report recognised an urgent need to renew and strengthen commitment to accelerated, sustained and transformative actions that enable civil society to continue fulfilling its essential role in advancing sustainable development, whether through the delivery of essential services, the promotion of democracy, accountability and human rights, or fostering public engagement in support of development co-operation in DAC countries.

1.3. Purpose of the Report

15. The DAC agreed to develop a report on the DAC Recommendation's implementation, dissemination and continued relevance no later than five years after its adoption, and at least every ten years thereafter (provision IX c. [\[OECD/LEGAL/5021\]](#)). In view of the five-year mark of its adoption in July 2026, the present implementation Report was developed with the following objectives:

- provide an assessment of Adherents' implementation of the substantive provisions of the DAC Recommendation focusing on overall or aggregate results, and the Secretariat's implementation support;
- provide an assessment of dissemination efforts of the DAC Recommendation by Adherents and the Secretariat; and
- assess the continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation, proposing any appropriate action(s) moving forward.

2. Methodology

16. The primary source of information for this implementation Report is a questionnaire developed by the OECD Secretariat and circulated to the 33 Adherents³ to the DAC Recommendation in the third quarter of 2025 (hereafter "Adherent questionnaire") [DCD(2025)11].⁴ Although the analysis of the implementation and dissemination of the DAC Recommendation focuses primarily on Adherents' policies and practices based on findings from the Adherent questionnaire, the OECD Secretariat also developed a questionnaire circulated to CSOs (hereafter "CSO questionnaire") to complement insights from Adherents. This was shared in the last quarter of 2025 with the

³ At the time of the preparation of the implementation Report, the Adherents to the DAC Recommendation are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic ("Czechia"), Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁴ Following the circulation of the Adherents' questionnaire, Romania joined the DAC as an Associate and adhered to the DAC Recommendation on 17 December 2025. Romania did not participate in the data collection for the purposes of this implementation Report, which concentrates on the period from the adoption of the DAC Recommendation to December 2025, i.e. before Romania's adherence to the DAC Recommendation.

CSO RG and with other CSOs via the CoP on Civil Society. The CSO questionnaire was developed in light of the DAC Recommendation, which “encourages relevant non-governmental partners to disseminate and follow” it.⁵

17. Both the Adherent and CSO questionnaires were designed to assess strengths and challenges in implementing the DAC Recommendation across its three interlinked Pillars. They also gathered input on the DAC Recommendation’s dissemination and continued relevance, as well as on priorities for the future for Adherents in light of recent developments. Both questionnaires were structured across three sections:

- Section A. Implementation of substantive provisions of the DAC Recommendation
 - Pillar 1. Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space
 - Pillar 2. Supporting and engaging with civil society
 - Pillar 3. Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability
- Section B. Dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation
- Section C. Recent developments and priorities for the future

18. The Adherent questionnaire was developed by the OECD Secretariat and informed by questionnaires that fed into implementation Reports of other (DAC) Recommendations, including the *Monitoring of the 2019 DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* [DCD/DAC(2023)19], the *Survey – Implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance* [DCD/DAC(2023)42], and the *Questionnaire for Adherents on the Recommendation of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development* [COM/DCD/DAC/GOV/PGC(2023)2]. It also benefited from inputs from relevant parts of the OECD Secretariat and from select representatives of the DAC CoP on Civil Society.

19. The Adherent questionnaire included questions addressing self-reported progress on implementation of each of the DAC Recommendation’s 28 provisions, as well as on overall challenges faced in implementing each Pillar of the DAC Recommendation. It included both closed questions, wherein Adherents were invited to select one or multiple applicable options accompanied by a space for elaboration, and open-ended questions. The Adherent questionnaire also included questions on Adherents’ efforts to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, on its continued relevance and on recent developments and priorities for the future. While DAC members responded based on their expert assessment of their governments’ efforts and with varying degrees of cross-government consultation, their responses may not reflect the entirety of those governments’ policies or practices.

20. The CSO questionnaire was developed in consultation with the CSO RG Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society. It included questions on CSOs’ perception of DAC members’ implementation of each Pillar of the DAC Recommendation, as well as on CSOs’ perception of challenges and opportunities faced by DAC members which could impact progress in implementation. Similarly to the Adherent questionnaire, the CSO questionnaire included questions on CSOs’ efforts to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, on its continued relevance, and on recent developments and priorities for the future. At the request of the CSO RG and in the interest of transparency, the OECD Secretariat shared the substantive data gathered through the CSO questionnaire with two designated members of the CSO RG Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society. This data supported the CSO RG in preparing

⁵ DAC Recommendation, VIII [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)]

an independent, CSO-led analysis to run in parallel with the present implementation Report led by the DAC (Tomlinson and Dutta, 2026^[6]; DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2026^[7]; DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2026^[8]).⁶

21. The analysis of the questionnaire responses in this implementation Report concentrates on aggregate figures and wider trends, with data from the questionnaires remaining non-attributed to specific respondents, except for the illustrative examples from Adherents. Where illustrative examples were taken from Adherent questionnaire responses, publicly accessible references were used to support the examples where possible. The analysis under each provision of the DAC Recommendation draws primarily on evidence provided by Adherents through the questionnaire and consultations. This is complemented under each Pillar by a dedicated box reflecting CSOs' views drawn from their questionnaire responses and from perspectives shared in consultations, as well as by a section on implementation challenges which draws on insights from both Adherents and CSOs – whether shared through questionnaires or consultations – together with relevant external sources. Given that Adherent responses are self-reported, they may not fully capture the range of government policies and practices relevant to the implementation of each provision. The CSO and other external evidence presented alongside this analysis is therefore not merely complementary, but essential to assessing the extent to which reported actions and policy commitments translate into meaningful change for civil society.

22. This implementation Report uses counts of respondents' answers to describe the level of implementation of each provision, based on responses to the Adherent and CSO questionnaires. The text and figures outline the number of Adherents or CSOs who answered the questionnaire selecting a given response option. For some multiple-choice questions in both questionnaires, respondents could select more than one response option. As a result, the number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents for certain questions. Responses marked as "other" in multiple-choice questions are included in the total number of respondents. Annex B presents, for each question in the Adherent (Table 1.1) and CSO questionnaire (Table 1.2), the count and percentage of respondents selecting each response option, calculated against the total number of respondents to that question.

23. The questionnaires aimed to collect information from the date of the DAC Recommendation's adoption (6 July 2021), or from the date of adherence to the DAC Recommendation⁷, up to the date of Adherents' submission of the questionnaire in the final quarter of 2025. The implementation Report applied a cut-off date of December 2025, aiming to capture policy developments taking place in Adherent countries up to that point.

24. Responses to the Adherent questionnaire were gathered between September and November 2025, with a total of 27 Adherents (hereafter "Adherent Respondents")

⁶ A summary of the CSO responses, prepared by Brian Tomlinson, Executive Director of AidWatch Canada, and Nikhil Dutta, Senior Legal Advisor, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), on behalf of the DAC-CSO RG Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society, can be found [here](#) (Tomlinson and Dutta, 2026^[6]). The DAC-CSO RG also developed an action agenda – available [here](#) in long-form and [here](#) in short-form – for DAC members and the Secretariat on advancing implementation of the DAC Recommendation, which draws on anonymised data from the CSO questionnaire and from civil society initiatives (DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2026^[7]; DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2026^[8]).

⁷ In July 2021, all 30 DAC members (at the time) adopted the DAC Recommendation. By the time the questionnaires were issued in 2025, the number of Adherents had increased to 33. This increase reflects the accession of new DAC members following the date of adoption of the DAC Recommendation, namely Lithuania (November 2022), Estonia (July 2023) and Latvia (March 2025).

submitting their questionnaire responses (Table 2.1). See Table 1.1 in Annex B for an overview of the aggregate responses to the Adherent questionnaire.

Table 2.1. List of Adherent Respondents

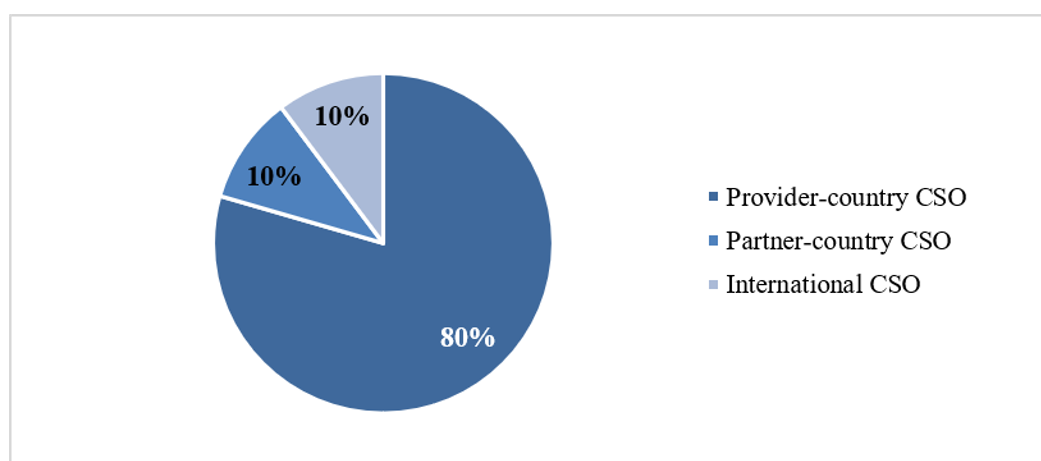
Coverage by monitoring mechanisms		
Adherents	Adherent questionnaire for the five-year Report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation (2025)	DAC Peer Reviews including self-assessment* against the DAC Recommendation (2022-2026)
Australia	Yes	Yes
Austria	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Belgium	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Canada	Yes	Yes
Czechia	Yes	Yes
Denmark	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Estonia	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
European Union	Yes	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes
France	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Greece	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Hungary	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	Yes
Ireland	No	Not reviewed during this period
Italy	Yes	Yes
Japan	Yes	Yes
Korea	Yes	Yes
Latvia	No	Not reviewed during this period
Lithuania	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	Yes	Yes
New Zealand	Yes	Yes
Norway	No	Yes
Poland	No	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes
Spain	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
Sweden	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	No	Yes
United Kingdom	Yes	Not reviewed during this period
United States	No	Yes
TOTAL	27	21

Note: *Coverage of the DAC Recommendation was added to the DAC peer review self-reporting template in 2022 and included as Annex B in the update to the peer-review methodology [DCD/DAC(2022)57/FINAL]. It provides reviewed DAC members with an opportunity to self-report on progress made and challenges encountered in implementing OECD and DAC legal instruments relevant to development co-operation, including the DAC Recommendation. Although peer reviews conducted prior to 2022 included coverage of the DAC Recommendation and broader civil society work, they are not considered part of the monitoring mechanisms for the DAC Recommendation in the implementation Report.

Source: Adherent questionnaire; DAC Peer Reviews conducted from 2022.

25. Responses to the CSO questionnaire were collected between October and December 2025, with a total of 39 CSOs (hereafter “CSO Respondents”) submitting their questionnaire response, though their insights are not attributed to specific respondents to ensure their anonymity throughout the implementation Report. See Table 1.2 in Annex B for an overview of the aggregate responses to the CSO questionnaire. The CSO questionnaire was shared with the CSO RG and with other CSOs via the CoP on Civil Society. Among CSO Respondents, 80% represented provider-country CSOs, 10% partner-country CSOs and 10% international CSOs (Figure 2.1). It should be noted that questionnaire responses from provider-country CSOs often represent consolidated inputs from umbrella or network organisations, which in some cases also reflect the views of partner-country CSOs. The sample of CSO Respondents under-represents partner-country and international CSOs. To address this and ensure a broader range of CSO perspectives was reflected in the Report, a series of oral and written consultations were conducted at different stages of the drafting process (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1. Type of CSOs responding to the CSO questionnaire



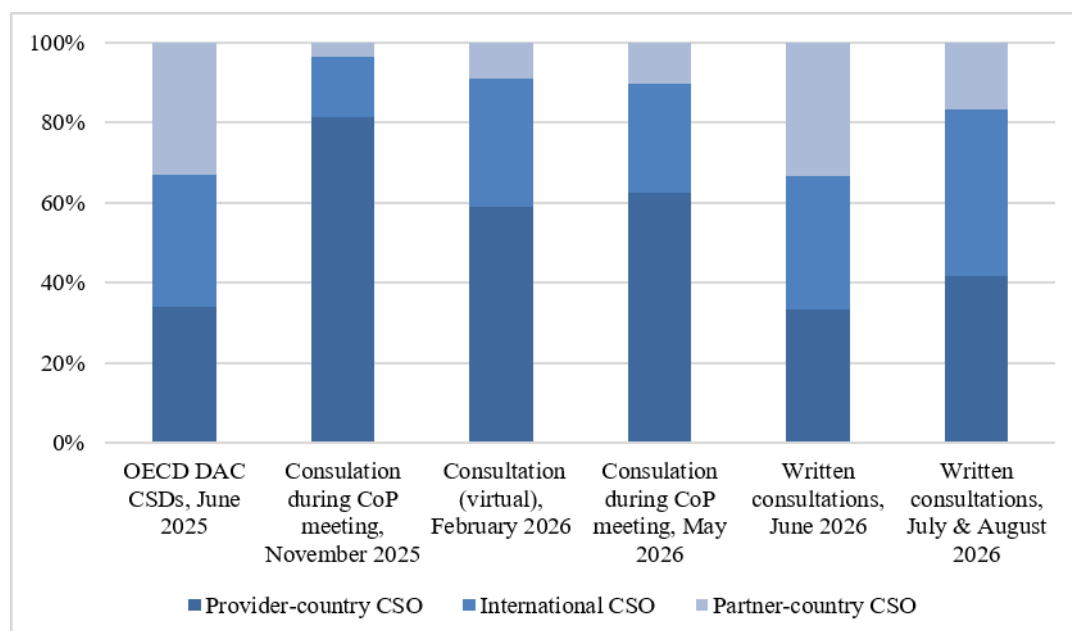
Note: Types of CSOs responding to the CSO questionnaire, based on a total sample of 39 CSO Respondents.
Source: CSO questionnaire.

26. Alongside these questionnaires, the implementation Report also includes: inputs from DAC Peer Reviews, including their annex assessing the reviewed DAC member’s progress on the DAC Recommendation; the DAC CoP on Civil Society biannual meetings where DAC members share progress in a *tour de table*; the three toolkits published to support implementation of the DAC Recommendation: *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries* (OECD, 2023^[9]), *Shifting Power with Partners* (OECD, 2024^[10]) and *Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space* (OECD, 2025^[11]); DAC statistics on ODA to and through CSOs (OECD, n.d.^[12]; OECD, 2026^[13]); as well as evidence gathered for the GPEDC *Making Development Co-operation More Effective Progress Report 2026* (OECD/UNDP, 2026^[14]), and other relevant literature.

27. To further enrich the implementation Report, the OECD Secretariat organised several oral and written consultations with CoP members, CSOs and other stakeholders. Consultations were organised with CoP members both alone and in a multistakeholder format with stakeholders from DAC and non-DAC OECD Member countries, CSOs, partner-country governments, philanthropy, multilateral development institutions and academia at the OECD DAC CSDs in June 2025, as well as during the November 2025 and May 2026 CoP meetings. Two online consultation sessions were held in February 2026

with CoP members and CSOs as well as three written consultations in June, July and August 2026. A wide range of CSOs participated in these consultations (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Type of CSOs participating in consultation sessions for the implementation Report



Note: The consultation sessions included participation from approximately 107 CSOs during the OECD DAC CSDs in June 2025; 27 CSOs during the CoP meeting in November 2025; 44 CSOs during the virtual consultation in February 2026; 48 CSOs during the CoP meeting in May 2026; 9 CSOs during the written consultations in June 2026; 9 CSOs during the written consultations in July 2026 and 3 CSOs during the written consultations in August 2026.

28. Inputs and examples provided during the consultations informed the analysis of Adherent and CSO perspectives throughout the implementation Report. However, references specifically to “Adherent Respondents” and “CSO Respondents” relate only to inputs provided through questionnaire responses. In addition, some Adherents that did not submit a questionnaire response contributed good practice examples that are reflected in the implementation Report.

3. Implementation

29. The following section provides an analysis as to how Adherents are implementing the three Pillars and their respective substantive provisions of the DAC Recommendation. It aims to provide insights on the breadth and depth of implementation across the Pillars, identifying progress and challenges, and highlighting relevant practices by Adherents. It also includes CSOs’ perspectives on Adherents’ efforts to implement each Pillar, including challenges and opportunities.

30. The analysis is structured Pillar by Pillar. However, it is important to note that the Pillars are mutually reinforcing and complementary. Implicit in the DAC Recommendation is the understanding that all three Pillars must be addressed together for Adherents to effectively enable civil society and maximise their varied contributions to the 2030 Agenda, the pledge to leave no one behind, inclusive sustainable development, effective

humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and strengthening democracy. Effective implementation of the DAC Recommendation requires engaging with the full enabling environment for civil society, including: the civic and political space in which civil society operates; the legal and regulatory frameworks governing its activities; the policy and fiscal conditions shaping its role as a development and humanitarian actor; and civil society's own effectiveness and accountability policies and practices. As these dimensions are closely interlinked, constraints in one area can undermine progress in another and narrow civic space overall.

3.1. Pillar 1: Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space

II. RECOMMENDS that Adherents, when acting in their roles as development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers, respect, protect and promote civic space [...]

31. The first Pillar of the DAC Recommendation focuses on respecting, protecting and promoting civic space as a prerequisite for effective development co-operation and humanitarian assistance. The DAC Recommendation recognises that civic space acts as a foundational condition for the realisation of human rights, democratic governance, accountability and the achievement of the SDGs. Without an open and inclusive civic space, civil society actors cannot meaningfully exercise their rights, participate in development processes, hold institutions accountable or contribute fully to sustainable development outcomes. The DAC Recommendation defines civic space as “the physical, virtual, legal, regulatory, and policy space where people can, among other things, securely exercise their rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, in keeping with human rights” [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)].

32. The first Pillar of the DAC Recommendation calls on Adherents to adopt a comprehensive and proactive approach to safeguarding civic space in both partner and provider countries. This includes developing clear policy positions recognising the value of an inclusive and independent civil society, engaging in sustained dialogue with partner-country governments and raising public awareness on the role of civil society in sustainable development, and co-ordinating with other development actors and relevant international, regional and national bodies to monitor civic space trends and respond coherently to emerging restrictions that violate international standards. Pillar 1 further emphasises the need for Adherents to take reasonable steps to “do no harm” to civic space, work with the private sector and independent media to promote social dialogue, and address risks arising from mis- and disinformation, digital exclusion, and the misapplication of anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) standards. By implementing these provisions, Adherents can help create an enabling environment in which civil society is able to exercise fundamental freedoms and contribute to sustainable development.

1. Develop clear policy positions on the value of an inclusive and independent civil society and on the importance of respecting, protecting, and promoting civic space in line with rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression.

33. All Adherent Respondents have either adopted or maintained policy positions on the value of an inclusive and independent civil society and/or on the importance of respecting, protecting and promoting civic space. These policy positions are reflected across a range of instruments.

34. A majority of Adherent Respondents have addressed civil society and/or civic space within broader development co-operation strategies and policies, in most cases developed in consultation with civil society representatives. For example, Portugal's

Development Cooperation Strategy 2030 recognises CSOs as strategic partners while also affirming their freedom of initiative (Government of Portugal, n.d.^[15]). Similarly, Estonia's Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2024-2030 highlights CSOs as key partners, with its Implementation Plan 2024-2026 emphasising democracy, rule of law and good governance as thematic priorities (Government of Estonia, n.d.^[16]; ESTDEV, n.d.^[17]).

35. Several Adherent Respondents have adopted strategies and policies focused explicitly on engagement with and support to civil society. For example, France's Strategic Guidance Paper on Civil Society and Civic Engagement 2023-2027, developed through broad ministerial and civil society consultation, recognises CSOs as independent development actors and prioritises the enabling environment for civil society, strengthening CSO capacities and partnerships, fostering civic engagement and amplifying the voice of CSOs internationally (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2025^[18]). Similarly, Iceland's strategy on co-operation with CSOs in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance frames CSOs as strategic partners while emphasising the need for capacity strengthening among CSOs (Government of Iceland, 2024^[19]; OECD, 2023^[20]). The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) developed the Policy Framework for Government-Civil Society Partnership jointly with the Korean NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation (KCOC), formalising the mutually equal co-operative relationship between the government and CSOs (OECD, 2023^[21]). This is supported by an implementation plan and a performance framework to monitor implementation, against which KOICA jointly reviews progress with civil society (OECD, 2024^[22]).

36. Adherent Respondents have also developed or revised guidelines on engagement with and support to civil society. Slovenia's guidelines for co-operation with CSOs, for example, establish a framework for engagement and co-operation with CSOs, while also governing their strategic partnerships with select humanitarian CSOs (Government of Slovenia, n.d.^[23]; OECD, 2024^[24]). The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) developed Guiding Principles on Support to Civil Society in 2018, which continue to act as a framework for Norad's partnership with civil society (Norad, 2018^[25]). Similarly, Finland adopted Guidelines for Civil Society in Development Policy, which are founded on the recognition that strengthening civil society is both a development policy goal in and of itself, as well as a means to achieving other development policy goals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2017^[26]).

37. Furthermore, several Adherent Respondents have legal frameworks at the national level – in the form of laws, decrees, acts, charters, or resolutions – that recognise the role of CSOs within their development co-operation systems. For example, Spain's Law No. 1/2023 on Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity defines the objectives of its development co-operation policy while formalising CSOs as key actors in Spain's development co-operation system (Government of Spain, 2023^[27]). Similarly, Italy's Law No. 125/2014 sets out the primary objectives of Italian development co-operation and recognises CSOs as key actors in development and humanitarian aid (Government of Italy, 2014^[28]). Other legal frameworks focus specifically on government-CSO relations, such as Greece's Presidential Decree No. 4/2023, which regulates access to public funding through mandatory registration (Government of Greece, 2023^[29]), and Slovenia's Non-Governmental Organisations Act 2018, which provides a legal definition of CSOs and establishes the conditions under which a CSO may obtain the status of an organisation operating in the public interest (Government of Slovenia, 2018^[30]). Finally, a few Adherent Respondents explicitly referenced the DAC Recommendation in relevant policy positions, such as in the Medium-Term Cooperation Strategy 2025-2030 of the Slovak Republic (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2025^[31]) and within France's Strategic Guidance Paper on Civil Society and Civic Engagement 2023-2027 (Ministry for

Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2025^[18]). Across questionnaire responses and throughout consultations, Adherents stressed that the DAC Recommendation is used as a guiding reference when designing strategies, policies, guidelines and programmes relevant to civil society and civic space in development co-operation.

38. Overall, while policy positions are established by all Adherent Respondents, these positions differ in terms of the degree of commitment to support civil society and promote civic space. There is significant diversity in the form, scope and ambition of their reported policy positions. This is particularly the case regarding the degree to which policy positions move beyond recognising civil society actors as solely implementing partners, towards affirming their role as independent development and humanitarian actors, and the importance of civic space to enable their work.

39. Adherent Respondents pointed to the fact that the four years following the adoption of the DAC Recommendation were characterised by progress in the adoption and improvement of policy instruments, alongside persistent challenges in implementation. In the last year, however, Adherents noted that these challenges have both changed in nature and accelerated in pace. Cuts to development co-operation budgets, rising political polarisation and growing restrictions on civic space across both provider and partner countries have together altered the operating environment for implementation of their respective policy positions and instruments.

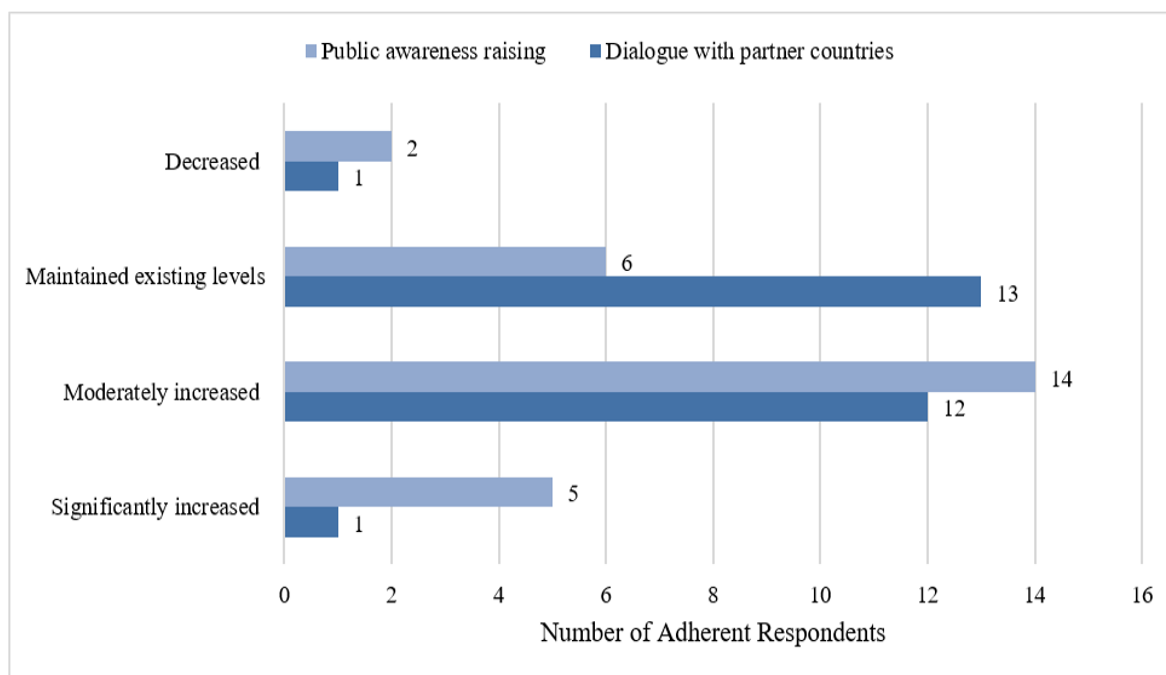
40. In conclusion, this points to an emerging gap between policy commitment and practical implementation. While all Adherent Respondents have adopted and strengthened policy positions on civil society and/or civic space since 2021, their capacity to translate these into practice has become increasingly challenging.

2. Seek to engage in dialogue with partner-country or territory governments and raise public awareness on the value of an inclusive and independent civil society and civil society participation and on respecting, protecting and promoting civic space.

41. Thirteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing dialogue with partner-country or territory governments on civil society and civic space, while 12 have moderately increased such dialogue. A minority have significantly increased or decreased it (1 Adherent Respondent in each case) (Figure 3.1). Adherent Respondents reported engaging in dialogue with partner-country governments through a range of initiatives and at different levels. Some reported adopting a structured approach by involving partner-country governments throughout the full cycle of strategies or programmes related to civil society and civic space. In these cases, dialogue often takes the form of working groups, platforms, forums or systematic consultations. Depending on the intended objective, Adherent Respondents make use of diplomatic dialogue for partner-country government engagement. Others take more ad hoc approaches, engaging with partner-country governments through thematic working groups, in thematic or programme-specific consultations, or during key events.

42. Fourteen Adherent Respondents have moderately increased public awareness raising on civil society and civic space, while 6 have maintained existing levels, 5 have significantly increased their efforts and 2 have decreased public awareness raising (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Extent to which Adherent Respondents’ dialogue with partner-country governments and public awareness raising on civil society and civic space has changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the questions: “How has your dialogue with partner country governments on civil society and civic space changed?” and “How has your public awareness raising on civil society and on civic space changed?”.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

43. Overall, communication channels range from high-level speeches to digital outreach via social media and grassroots campaigns. Adherent Respondents highlighted efforts to communicate systematically with consistent messaging on civil society and civic space-related issues, with some conducting outreach initiatives for both domestic and partner-country audiences to raise awareness of civil society’s role in development co-operation, with an emphasis on the role of CSOs as strategic partners and drivers of impact. Global Affairs Canada’s (GAC) International Development Week is an example of awareness raising targeting a domestic audience, with a focus on Canada’s role in delivering international assistance through stories highlighting the role of CSOs in supporting gender equality, climate action, global health and education in partner countries (Government of Canada, n.d.^[32]).

44. Some Adherent Respondents also referenced engagement with CSO platforms and regional CSOs from provider and/or partner countries as co-disseminators and amplifiers of messaging on civic space, recognising their role in reaching broader and more diverse audiences. For example, New Zealand has supported awareness raising through its partnerships with the Pacific Feminist Fund, the Pacific Disability Forum and the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network, all regional CSOs which respectively help raise awareness on women’s rights, disability inclusion and other issues affecting vulnerable and marginalised groups across the Pacific.

45. On institutionally driven awareness raising, Australia established the Development Communications and Partnerships Section (DCN) within its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to enhance coherence and impact in development communications and

to support the inclusion of civil society voices in their communications strategy. Australia's DFAT has also conducted public opinion research to ensure communications on civic space are responsive to domestic audiences and shifting public sentiment.

46. Furthermore, awareness-raising efforts are closely linked to strategies related to development education and global citizenship education (GCE), which have been highlighted as particularly relevant to broadening and deepening understanding of and support for development co-operation in an environment of increasing scepticism and loss of trust within providers' domestic constituencies. For example, Portugal's National Strategy for Development Education 2025-2030 was developed in consultation with civil society, aiming to raise awareness on issues related to sustainable development while also aspiring to counter mis- and disinformation targeted against civil society, humanitarian assistance and development co-operation (Government of Portugal, 2025^[33]). Additionally, the Netherlands' Connected Without Borders (*Grenzeloos Verbonden*) programme aims to both increase public awareness while gathering citizens' views and standpoints, and to improve public opinion by facilitating dialogue with Dutch citizens on the value of development co-operation while raising awareness on the work and impact of the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

47. Initiatives to identify, capture and analyse public sentiment at individual and collective levels have been identified as being useful in shaping CSOs' strategies for public engagement and awareness raising. Ireland provides support to the longitudinal Dóchas Worldview Research Project, which measures domestic attitudes to international development co-operation and ODA, allowing tracking of key changes in public outlook over time (Dóchas, n.d.^[34]). The annual study provides CSOs and other stakeholders with the opportunity to gauge levels of awareness, engagement and support among the public across a variety of topics relating to global development, enabling CSOs to develop informed and relevant GCE and communications approaches.

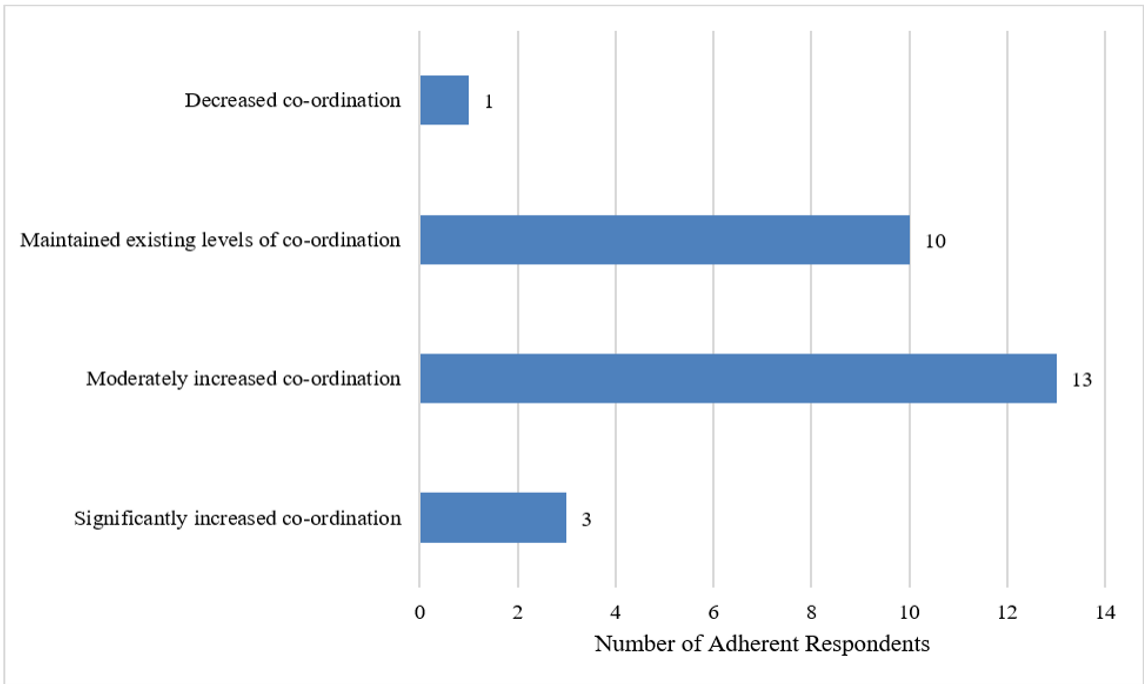
48. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents report significant variation in the depth and quality of their engagement in dialogue with partner-country governments and public awareness raising. On dialogue with partner-country governments, a clear distinction emerges between Adherent Respondents that have developed institutionalised approaches whereby discussions on civil society and civic space are continuously integrated into the full cycle of political and programmatic engagement, and those that rely on ad hoc or event-driven interactions. Furthermore, while Adherent Respondents did not specifically address the timing of their engagement with partner-country governments, proactive engagement – particularly in response to early-warning signs of civic space restrictions, such as when restrictive legislation (e.g. foreign-funding limitations, AML/CTF measures, protest restrictions) is still under debate – is key to ensuring that early engagement can help prevent, rather than merely respond to, the constraint of civic space. CSO-led monitoring mechanisms play a particularly important role in identifying emerging risks across countries and regions, and in supporting provider countries in identifying when, and on what issues, to engage partner-country governments. Crucially, a number of Adherent Respondents acknowledged that sustaining meaningful dialogue has become increasingly difficult in contexts of democratic backsliding and civic space restrictions, as engagement on civil society issues risks being perceived as a form of foreign interference by partner-country governments, potentially putting strain on bilateral relations. These dynamics suggest that, as some partner countries become increasingly restrictive of civil society, governmental dialogue on civic space becomes more challenging. On public awareness raising, efforts have generally been maintained or increased, with initiatives focused on amplifying the positive contributions of civil society through impact stories, as well as raising awareness on the closure of civic space across certain partner countries. However,

the rise of mis- and disinformation campaigns targeting civil society requires intensified efforts and a more strategic approach to awareness raising.

3. Co-ordinate among providers and with international, regional and national bodies to monitor openings and restrictions of civic space, enhance access to and sharing of information, and foster stronger, more coherent proactive and preventive actions.

49. Thirteen Adherent Respondents reported having moderately increased co-ordination with international, regional and national bodies to protect and promote civic space in partner countries. Furthermore, 10 have maintained existing levels of co-ordination and 3 have significantly increased their co-ordination, while 1 Adherent Respondent has decreased co-ordination (Figure 3.2). In their co-ordination among providers, Adherent Respondents have highlighted efforts to engage in dialogue on best practices and in the monitoring of civic space. These include participation in platforms such as the DAC CoP on Civil Society, which several Adherent Respondents cited as a key space for the sharing of information, analyses and best practices.

Figure 3.2. Extent to which Adherent Respondents’ co-ordination with other providers, and with international, regional and national bodies to protect civic space in partner countries has changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question: “How has your co-ordination with other providers, and with international, regional and national bodies to protect civic space in partner countries changed (e.g. joint programming and/or funding, sharing information)?”.
Source: Adherent questionnaire.

50. A key initiative is the EU’s Team Europe Democracy (TED), which strengthens evidence-based support for democracy by enhancing co-ordination among EU institutions, EU Member States, think tanks, academia and CSOs across three priorities: political and civic participation, media and digital, and accountability and rule of law (EU, n.d.^[35]). Several Adherent Respondents cited TED’s role in improving information sharing and enabling a co-ordinated EU response in support of democracy and civic space protection.

In parallel, the EU is also co-ordinating with international CSO-led initiatives such as the EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE), led by 2 consortia of international CSOs and involving CSOs from 86 countries (EU SEE, n.d.^[36]). Through its Early Warning and Monitoring Mechanism, EU SEE provides timely data on trends in civic space, helping stakeholders respond to emerging signs of restrictions and identify opportunities for engagement (OECD, 2025^[11]).

51. Adherent Respondents also highlighted engagements in broader multilateral fora as spaces for joint information sharing and advocacy on civic space restrictions. These included UN agencies and clusters, EU working groups such as its Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA), OECD bodies and informal groups such as the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) and the CoP on Civil Society, and platforms such as the Grand Bargain. Adherent Respondents also highlighted their engagement in regional initiatives – such as TED, the Pacific Disability Forum and the Pacific Feminist Fund – to engage in co-ordinated approaches and reduce duplication.

52. Adherent Respondents also referred to their co-ordination with other providers present in partner countries. As highlighted in the OECD toolkit on *Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space*, such co-ordination may include joint programming and funding, monitoring openings and restrictions of civic space and enhancing access to and sharing of information (OECD, 2025^[11]). Examples include Canada’s engagement in provider co-ordination platforms in Nigeria, such as the Nigeria Development Partners Group, where GAC collaborates with bilateral and multilateral partners and engages with civil society actors and government stakeholders. Similarly, Italy participates in platforms like the Group of Cooperators (GRuC) in Colombia, which facilitates information exchange and co-ordination among providers, UN agencies and international CSOs, while enabling engagement with government, civil society and private sector actors.

53. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents report having broadly maintained or moderately increased levels of co-ordination on civic space, with meaningful progress in the use of multilateral platforms and regional mechanisms. However, several acknowledged that ongoing budget cuts have led to the closure of several co-ordination initiatives that had been developed since 2021. Cuts to development co-operation budgets have, in some cases, led to the withdrawal of major providers from pooled funds and shared platforms for information sharing and joint planning, which have significantly disrupted the operations of established co-ordination channels. Furthermore, while Adherent Respondents have supported and engaged with international, national and regional bodies monitoring trends in the enabling environment for civil society – such as the CSO-led EU SEE – this engagement has not yet translated into systematic use of early-warning data to inform preventive engagement and programming on civic space. Adherents’ support to civic space programming remains predominantly reactive, mobilised after restrictions have been implemented. Making broader and more systematic use of CSO-led monitoring data would allow Adherents to shift towards more preventive engagement, anticipating and potentially averting the contraction of civic space.

4. Take reasonable steps to do no harm to civic space in partner countries or territories.

54. Fourteen Adherent Respondents reported that they have maintained existing levels of effort in implementing the “do no harm” principle on civic space in partner countries or territories, while 13 have moderately increased their efforts. Adherent Respondents referenced a range of steps to “do no harm” to civic space, with many taking more deliberate and structured approaches, embedding this principle as a criterion for analysing project proposals and selecting partners, and requiring context analyses and risk-mitigation assessments consistently throughout the programming cycle. These include analyses

focused on gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) analysis, human rights-based analysis, political economy analysis (PEA), feminist monitoring and evaluation – most of which include civic space considerations. Several Adherent Respondents have developed internal guidelines and toolkits to advise offices and embassies in partner countries on how to engage and support civil society actors defending civic space and on how to intervene on civic space issues through preventive, proactive and emergency responses.

55. For example, Czechia’s cross-cutting priorities methodology, following the Strategy for Foreign Development Cooperation of Czechia 2018-2030, navigates mainstreaming of good governance across all stages of the project cycle, emphasising a “do no harm” approach to civic space and promoting civil society participation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechia, n.d.^[37]). The institution responsible for the respective development co-operation instrument and implementing partners and evaluators are required to work with a checklist based on OECD/DAC markers, to ensure awareness, evidence and compliance (Government of Czechia, n.d.^[38]; OECD, 2023^[39]). Similarly, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) introduced a Digital Rights Check tool which helps ensure that digital projects and solutions do not negatively affect human rights by providing guidance to identify, prevent and mitigate risks (BMZ, n.d.^[40]).

56. Some Adherent Respondents highlighted that they encourage collaboration with partner-country-based CSOs, grassroots organisations, regional CSO networks and women’s rights organisations (WROs) as a way to mitigate harm to civic space by expanding participation and the representation of interests of a broader range of civil society actors. For example, Canada’s Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance adopts a feminist approach, emphasising engagement with local WROs in partner countries and encouraging partners to integrate feminist monitoring and evaluation practices (Government of Canada, n.d.^[41]). Similarly, Australia’s Locally Led Development Guidance promotes context-specific approaches that consider local dynamics, including civic space constraints, helping to ensure that interventions “do no harm” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, n.d.^[42]).

57. Furthermore, several Adherent Respondents underlined that their approach to “doing no harm” to civic space entails co-ordination across line ministries to ensure coherence with other policy areas such as humanitarian, security and migration policy. Some also cited using the DAC Recommendation as a guiding framework to “do no harm”, as well as additional instruments including the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) [[OECD/LEGAL/0381](#)] (OECD, 2010^[43]) and the OECD DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus [[OECD/LEGAL/5019](#)] (OECD, 2019^[44]). For example, Italy’s Operational Manual for Joint Context Analysis in Situations of Crisis and Fragility cites the DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus as a guiding framework, and provides a standardised methodology for the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and partners to conduct joint context analyses in fragile and crisis-affected settings to ensure programming incorporates conflict sensitivity and does no harm (AICS, 2025^[45]).

58. However, Adherent Respondents also stressed some challenges in preventing harm to civic space during operations. In partner countries experiencing restrictions to civic space, or in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, CSOs face considerable security risks when operating. Adherent Respondents therefore noted that supporting partner-country CSOs in high-risk contexts can expose civil society actors to security risks. However, no Adherent Respondent reported having withdrawn funding on “do no harm” grounds. Rather, Adherent Respondents recognised the need to adapt their support modalities to

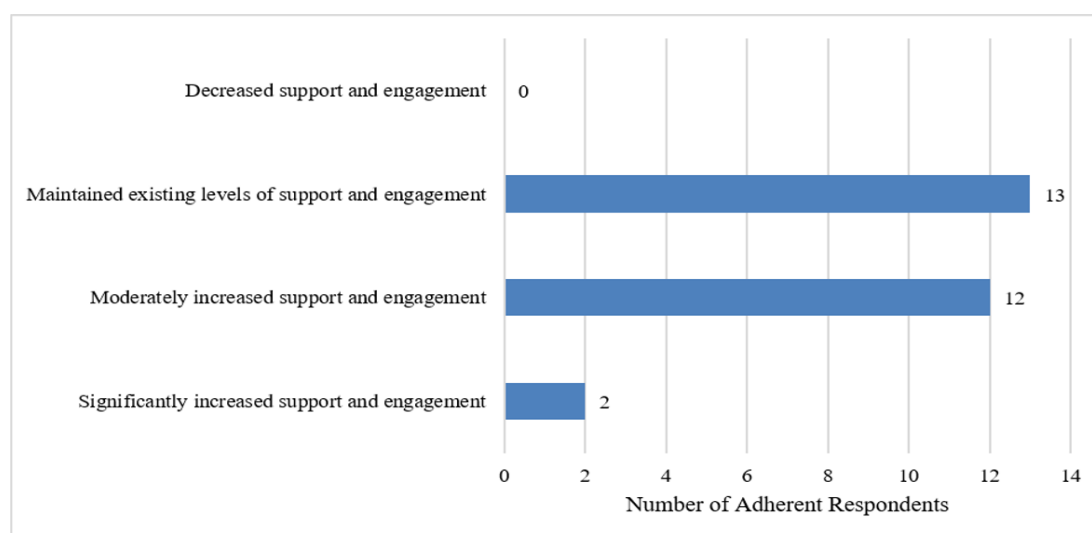
mitigate harm, stressing the importance of preserving engagement and support for civil society actors in restrictive contexts, rather than using such risks as a reason to disengage. Switzerland led a learning journey between 2021-2023 to strengthen Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) engagement in authoritarian contexts, resulting in practical guidance to help country offices tailor responses to different trajectories of autocratisation (OECD, 2025^[46]). Building on this, SDC is undertaking an exercise to assess various diplomatic and operational approaches for supporting civil society in contexts with foreign funding restrictions, with the aim of preventing harm to civil society actors and civic space⁸.

59. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents have made progress in adopting a more systematic and structured approach to preventing harm to civil society and civic space such as through the embedding of civic space considerations in context analyses, risk assessments, and partner selection criteria throughout the programming cycle, as well as in the development of internal guidelines and toolkits to guide field-level responses. Nevertheless, implementation challenges persist, particularly in fragile, conflict-affected and restrictive contexts, where support from providers can expose civil society actors to heightened security risks. As civic space restrictions become more widespread, the prevention of harm will require operational adaptability by providers and stronger policy coherence across provider line ministries.

5. Support and engage with international, regional, and national bodies and initiatives that work to respect, protect, and promote civic space.

60. Thirteen Adherent Respondents reported that their support to and engagement with international, regional and national bodies has been maintained at existing levels, while 12 have moderately increased and 2 significantly increased support and engagement (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Extent to which Adherent Respondents' support and engagement with international, regional and national bodies that work to protect civic space has changed since 2021



⁸ Switzerland's exercise is internal and its results are not public and therefore not available online.

Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “How have your support and engagement with international, regional, and national bodies that work to protect civic space changed (e.g. providing funding, conducting dialogue, engaging in diplomatic efforts)?”.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

61. Adherent Respondents highlighted direct engagement with partner-country governments and local authorities, such as through bilateral funding and diplomatic advocacy, to promote civic space. In highly restrictive contexts where government engagement was not possible, Adherents stressed that they focus on engaging with and supporting partner-country CSOs. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents referred to the development of public statements, both at the national and EU level, to address civic space trends in partner countries, especially to condemn and raise awareness on civic space restrictions.

62. Furthermore, several Adherent Respondents referred to their engagement with and support to provider-country CSOs and CSO networks, as well as a growing emphasis on engaging and funding partner-country CSOs. For example, Ireland has partnered with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) to provide funding to civil society actors in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to defend and expand civic space, with an emphasis on their role in promoting an enabling environment for good governance, transparency and democratic accountability.

63. Adherent Respondents have also referred to their engagement in bodies including provider co-ordination initiatives, international forums and multilateral organisations. For example, several Adherent Respondents highlighted the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), an EU-established initiative providing technical and financial support to CSOs and independent media initiatives promoting democratisation and human rights in the European Neighbourhood, Western Balkans, Türkiye and Eurasia. The EED focuses particularly on civil society actors with limited access to institutional funding, including “newly created or non-registered organisations, informal platforms, youth groups and individuals” (EED, n.d.^[47]). In 2025, it introduced an Emergency Funding Mechanism to rapidly support organisations at risk of closure due to ODA cuts, helping sustain their operations and contributions to democratic processes.

64. While several Adherent Respondents noted that they anticipate a decrease in support for international, regional and national bodies over the coming years due to budget cuts, a few Adherent Respondents have reportedly increased the availability of funding to such initiatives in response to reductions by other providers. For example, the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants’ Civil Society Fund, which supports organisations that promote human rights, democracy and good governance in fifteen EU countries, saw an unprecedented increase in available funding from EUR 200 million to over EUR 300 million for the new funding period, which was made possible by its funders Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein (EEA and Norway Grants, 2025^[48]).

65. In conclusion, most Adherent Respondents have reportedly maintained or increased support to and engagement with international, regional and national initiatives that protect civic space. However, this support may decline in coming years, in line with expected funding reductions across the broader provider community. Such a trend would risk leaving bodies that protect civic space under-resourced at precisely the moment they are most needed.

6. Support, as appropriate, partner-country or territory government institutions of accountability and oversight, legal, and regulatory frameworks, and capacities to enable civil society in line with human rights, as well as to prevent unintended

consequences due to misinterpretation or misapplication of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing standards.

66. Ten Adherent Respondents reported having maintained existing levels of support for partner-country government institutions responsible for accountability and oversight, while 6 reported having provided no support. Among Adherent Respondents, reasons for providing support varied, including to enable civil society in line with human rights (9 Adherent Respondents), to prevent unintended consequences due to misinterpretation or misapplication of AML and CTF standards (8 Adherent Respondents), and for other reasons (5 Adherent Respondents). Among those selecting “for other reasons”, these were primarily related to supporting partner-country institutions in strengthening good governance and operational efficiency. Those reporting having provided no support justified this with various reasons, including not providing direct support to partner-country governments, not receiving requests for support by partner-country institutions or CSOs, and providing such support through other ministries rather than within the framework of development co-operation.

67. Where support was provided, Adherent Respondents indicated that this aligned with partner-country governments’ own priorities and spanned the three branches of government, encompassing capacity strengthening, technical assistance and policy dialogue. Areas of focus included reinforcing AML and CTF standards in line with FATF requirements, as well as broader rule of law and good governance priorities such as anti-corruption, public finance management and oversight (see Pillar 2, provision 10).

68. At the level of executive institutions, for example, Italy has provided support to the Kurdistan Regional Government in developing and implementing the Law on Domestic Violence in line with international standards. Furthermore, Italy has conducted targeted dialogue with specific bodies within the Kurdistan Regional Government to enforce the operational integrity of accountability bodies, including engagement with the department focused on protecting CSO registration. In addition, the Slovak Republic has provided support to Moldova’s government in conducting spending reviews across the education, agriculture and health sectors, resulting in the adoption of a methodology and the integration of spending reviews as a mandatory requirement under Moldova’s Public Finance Strategy 2023-2030 for all public institutions.

69. At the level of legislative branches, the EU’s INTER PARES Programme supports partner-country parliaments, providing capacity strengthening both to elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and to the staff of parliamentary secretariats, with a focus on enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions (INTER PARES, n.d.^[49]).

70. At the judicial level, Austria has provided budget support to Uganda’s Justice, Law and Order Sector, with a programme designed to foster equitable access to justice for Ugandan citizens, focused on marginalised groups including women, youth, refugees and people in need of legal assistance (Austrian Development Agency, n.d.^[50]). The programme also seeks to increase public trust in justice institutions, reduce case backlogs and expand access to frontline justice service points.

71. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents highlighted efforts to engage with and support partner-country governments to enable civil society, as well as to prevent the unintended consequences of the misapplication or misinterpretation of AML/CTF standards. However, this engagement is becoming harder to sustain in the context of growing civic space restrictions in both provider and partner countries. As civic space shrinks in partner countries, providers face a growing risk that engagement with government institutions on these themes will be interpreted as foreign interference. In

highly restrictive contexts, some Adherent Respondents reported adapting by shifting support towards CSOs and multilateral organisations rather than government institutions directly. Without regular context analysis informed by local actors, such support can unintentionally undermine civic space, alienate local communities and fuel narratives that delegitimise civil society actors, ultimately exposing partner-country CSOs to greater security risks. At the same time, Adherent Respondents recognised the importance of maintaining engagement and dialogue with partner-country governments wherever possible, rather than disengaging entirely. Compounding these challenges, restrictions on civic space within provider countries themselves risk undermining the credibility and leverage that providers rely on to promote an enabling environment for civil society abroad.

7. Work with the private sector and independent media, where appropriate, to respect, protect and promote open civic space and promote social dialogue as a prerequisite for conducive business and media environments.

72. Thirteen Adherent Respondents have worked with independent media and 7 with the private sector to promote civic space and social dialogue in partner countries, while 5 Adherent Respondents reported having done no work on either. Among those who have engaged in work with either of these sectors, 10 Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of work with independent media since 2021, while 4 have maintained existing levels of work with the private sector.

73. Adherent Respondents highlighted a range of initiatives in working with independent media to promote open civic space. These included financial support to independent media platforms, investigative journalists and journalists at risk or in exile, often with the aim of strengthening media literacy, fact-checking capabilities and resilience to disinformation, and in some cases focusing on conflict-affected contexts. Some Adherent Respondents also highlighted partnerships with media platforms to produce content on civic space and development issues as a means of raising public awareness. Others went beyond financial support, engaging in diplomatic advocacy with partner-country governments for more enabling media environments and stronger protections for journalists.

74. For example, the Slovak Republic has supported media development in Moldova through an EU-funded project implemented by the CSO People in Need Slovakia, with the aim of supporting regional and local media outlets and journalists with training, mentoring, consultations and grants (SlovakAid, 2024^[51]). Estonia has also implemented a project supporting independent media development in Georgia, by supporting Georgian journalists through a scholarship programme and a journalism award (ESTDEV, n.d.^[52]).

75. Belgium and Ireland funded the National Conversation Phase 5 (NC5), implemented by BBC Media Action in Tanzania, which focused on the role of media in strengthening democratic accountability by creating and strengthening platforms for citizens to voice concerns and engage with leaders (Openaid Belgium, n.d.^[53]). The programme strengthened the capacity of local radio stations and introduced new local and national radio shows, while also organising community events and dialogues to link communities to their local media.

76. The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), co-chaired by Finland and the United Kingdom, exemplifies multilateral co-ordination to support media freedom. Bringing together over 50 States alongside civil society, legal experts, international organisations and journalists, it works to strengthen the media environment and protect journalists (MFC, n.d.^[54]). Members of the MFC use diplomatic networks to monitor conditions and take actions at the partner-country level, and have supported initiatives such as UNESCO's

Global Media Defence Fund, which has provided legal and financial support to thousands of journalists worldwide (MFC, n.d.^[55]).

77. While Adherent Respondents reported comparatively fewer initiatives on working with the private sector to promote open civic space and social dialogue, several Adherent Respondents recognised the importance of strengthening engagement and co-operation with the private sector to leverage its role in fostering an enabling environment for civil society. Some Adherent Respondents have integrated private-sector engagement as a structural requirement within development co-operation programming, such as by making collaboration with local private sector actors a prerequisite within certain calls for proposals, particularly in programmes focusing on labour-market development and vocational education. Others have engaged the private sector through multistakeholder dialogue platforms, particularly on issues around responsible business conduct and supply-chain transparency. A smaller number of Adherent Respondents have sought to leverage private sector partnerships, including with social economy entities, trade unions and business associations, as vehicles for promoting social dialogue in partner countries.

78. For example, Sweden is supporting a programme on responsibility and sustainability in Latin American mining, implemented by the International Council for Swedish Industry (NIR), aiming to promote alignment with responsible business conduct, human rights and environmental sustainability standards in mining communities across Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and Peru (Openaid Sweden, n.d.^[56]). This is facilitated through training, promotion of good practices and peer exchange among mining associations, mining companies and representatives from civil society and indigenous communities.

79. In response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Japan has provided humanitarian assistance through the Japan Platform, a consortium of Japanese CSOs and businesses responding to humanitarian crises (Japan Platform, n.d.^[57]). Through public and private funding, members of the Platform have implemented programmes focusing on psychological and social support activities, cash transfers and the provision of food, water, sanitation and medical care.

80. In conclusion, support to independent media has emerged as a widespread area of engagement among Adherent Respondents, encompassing targeted financial support, diplomatic advocacy and co-ordinated multilateral action. Engagement with the private sector, by contrast, remains considerably more limited in both frequency and scope, with 5 Adherent Respondents reporting no work in this area, and those who have engaged having largely done so through isolated initiatives rather than a structured approach. Nonetheless, private sector engagement is likely to become an increasingly relevant area of opportunity for Adherents, particularly as a means of diversifying funding sources for civil society at a time of significant cuts to development co-operation budgets. There is scope for Adherents to develop a more strategic approach to leveraging the role of the private sector in enabling civil society.

8. Explore and share strategies among providers and with civil society actors to counter mis- and disinformation, harassment, discrimination and anti-democratic narratives targeting civil society.

81. Seven Adherent Respondents reported maintaining existing strategies to counter mis- and disinformation, harassment and discrimination targeting civil society, while an equal number (7 Adherent Respondents) reported having neither developed nor shared strategies on these issues. Among those who have maintained or adopted policies in this field, 2 Adherent Respondents reported having developed strategies at the provider-country level, 1 Adherent Respondent reported having shared strategies with civil society actors

and another Adherent Respondent reported having shared strategies with other providers. Finally, 11 Adherent Respondents reported having taken other steps to counter mis- and disinformation and discrimination targeting civil society. Approaches under “other steps” have included support to and/or initiatives targeting independent media and journalists, partner-country CSOs, human rights defenders (HRDs), youth groups and think tanks.

82. Adherent Respondents reported a growing range of initiatives aimed at countering mis- and disinformation, harassment and discrimination targeting civil society, including through financial support and targeted training to enhance media literacy, fact-checking capabilities and the use of digital tools among journalists, HRDs and independent media platforms. Some of these initiatives have focused specifically on election-related and climate disinformation, while others have addressed identity-based harassment and discrimination targeting youth, women, religious groups and other vulnerable and marginalised groups, with a particular emphasis on online spaces. For example, Lithuania has funded a project in Georgia implemented by the local CSO Youth Centre for Civil Development, aiming to strengthen the resilience of rural communities in conflict zones and ethnic minority settlements against disinformation and hybrid threats (Government of Lithuania, n.d.^[58]). Furthermore, some Adherent Respondents have developed initiatives focused on the monitoring of digital trends and threats, as well as toolkits and guidance related to foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).

83. Few Adherents have standalone strategies on mis- and disinformation. The Netherlands is a notable example, with a government-wide strategy on tackling disinformation focusing on democratic processes, public health, societal stability and national security (Government of the Netherlands, 2024^[59]). More commonly, disinformation is integrated into broader strategies on security or civil society. For instance, New Zealand’s National Security Strategy 2023-2028 identifies disinformation as a threat to democracy and social cohesion and promotes a whole-of-society response, including civil society engagement and dedicated funding (Government of New Zealand, 2023^[60]). Similarly, the Slovak Republic’s Strategy for Civil Society Development 2022-2030 prioritises partnership between government and civil society to counter disinformation targeting civil society (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2022^[61]).

84. Complementing these efforts, the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI) – launched in 2023 as a Team Europe Initiative by Denmark, the EU and Norway – supports partner-country and grassroots CSOs in using digital tools to promote democracy and defend civic space, with a focus on disinformation. Supported initiatives include ChequeaBolivia, which combats electoral disinformation through fact-checking and public outreach, and Umunthu Plus in Malawi, which provides digital security training to journalists and civil society (DDI, n.d.^[62]). Another example is the Digital Enquirer Kit (DEK), supported by Germany and the EU, which offers e-learning on preventing misinformation, with an emphasis on media literacy and source verification (Digital Enquirer, n.d.^[63]).

85. In conclusion, while most Adherent Respondents report having taken some steps to counter mis- and disinformation targeting civil society, these initiatives differ widely in their level of institutionalisation. Considering that an equal share of Adherent Respondents has developed strategies in this area as have taken no action at all suggests that formal, systematic approaches to countering mis- and disinformation have yet to be widely established, and that more information sharing and peer learning on this topic – involving a broad range of civil society actors, providers and partner-country governments – is warranted. This is particularly relevant considering that mis- and disinformation actively undermine the enabling environment for civil society, fuelling narratives that delegitimise civil society actors and are used to justify restrictions and attacks on civic space.

9. Support greater and more inclusive civil society participation in public policy at all levels of partner-country or territory governments and with other institutions, including through the use of digital technologies.

86. Fourteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of support for promoting more civil society participation in public policies of partner-country or territory governments, while 11 Adherent Respondents have moderately increased support.

87. Adherent Respondents have supported civil society participation in public policy by promoting engagement of partner-country or territory civil society actors with their government authorities, including through the role of embassies and EU Delegations as facilitators of structured dialogue. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents have also reported various programmes focusing on open government efforts and participatory policymaking, such as through programmes focused on increasing digital inclusion, participation and digital government in partner countries. In addition, Adherent Respondents have provided support for civil society participation in public policy by supporting formal mechanisms such as forums, political dialogues and multistakeholder committees at the partner-country level, which aim to increase the consultation and engagement of civil society throughout policy processes (see Pillar 2, provision 2). However, several Adherent Respondents also recognised that budget cuts have limited the scope of this area of work.

88. Germany supports inclusive civil society participation through a range of initiatives such as PartiCipate, which provides tailored guidance to public institutions and CSOs on analogue and digital participation methods suited to local contexts (PartiCipate, n.d.^[64]), and the Inclusive Digital Governance in Palestine (INDIGO) programme, which engages citizens in designing digital services and public spaces (GIZ, 2024^[65]).

89. New Zealand's Partnering for Impact programme strengthens collaboration between New Zealand CSOs and partner-country CSOs through long-term arrangements with larger organisations (called "negotiated partnerships"), and a smaller competitive fund for project-based partnerships ("Manaaki Fund") (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[66]). A 2024 mid-term review of the programme found that sustained funding has enhanced CSOs' capacity to engage in public policy processes in partner countries.

10. Explore and address challenges, risks, and systematic inequalities associated with digital technologies that restrict or lead to digital disenfranchisement of civil society actors in partner countries or territories.

90. Eleven Adherent Respondents have moderately increased efforts to address the challenges of digital technologies impacting civil society actors in partner countries or territories and 9 have maintained existing levels of effort, while 3 Adherent Respondents reported having significantly increased them.

91. Adherent Respondents have addressed these challenges, risks and inequalities through a range of initiatives, including programmes focusing on capacity strengthening for digital literacy, both among CSOs and partner-country or territory governments. A series of initiatives have centred on the digital threats faced by civil society actors in partner countries, with programmes examining digital and cyber security, often focusing on restrictive contexts and targeting at-risk actors including HRDs and journalists. For example, the Netherlands' Safety for Voices 2022-2027 campaign supports the online and offline security of HRDs and journalists worldwide (Government of the Netherlands, 2022^[67]), including initiatives such as Sustaining Defenders through Feminist Holistic Security, which provides digital safety resources and support, advocacy and knowledge sharing for women HRDs (APC, 2026^[68]). Complementing this, the previously cited DDI

also addresses digital risks and threats faced by civil society actors, with a focus on countering disinformation (see Pillar 1, provision 8).

92. Several Adherent Respondents stressed that their approach to addressing digital technologies has widened to a recognition of digital tools as enablers of transparency, accountability and overall democratic development, and have therefore supported civil society and partner-country or territory governments in promoting digital inclusion and the development of accessible digital public goods. For example, Belgium supported the Digital for Girls and Women programme which aimed to increase women's opportunities in the digital space in Uganda and Burkina Faso by raising awareness, building capacity and strengthening community-led efforts to promote women's digital inclusion and online safety (Openaid Belgium, n.d.^[69]).

93. The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in development co-operation and enabling civil society, and its associated opportunities and risks, was recognised as a growing area of focus by Adherent Respondents. New Zealand has promoted AI in development co-operation through workshops delivered by its national umbrella CSO, the Council for International Development (CID). Germany supports the FAIR Forward – Artificial Intelligence for All programme, which fosters inclusive and sustainable AI through partnerships across Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, Uganda and India, with initiatives ranging from tackling deforestation with AI, AI bootcamps for women and youth in partner countries, and developing a methodology to conduct AI risk and ethics assessments (BMZ, n.d.^[70]).

94. Other initiatives by Adherent Respondents include statements or speeches in national, regional and multilateral spaces to condemn digital restrictions on or the digital disenfranchisement of CSO actors in partner countries. In crisis or authoritarian contexts where the digital space is highly restricted, some Adherent Respondents have used digital tools to establish safe communication channels, as well as enhance accountability by enabling feedback loops with beneficiaries.

95. In conclusion, most Adherent Respondents have maintained or increased their efforts to address the digital challenges facing civil society actors in partner countries, employing a wide range of approaches. While several Adherent Respondents recognise digitalisation as a growing priority across development co-operation agendas, targeted and strategic responses remain limited both in relation to mis- and disinformation targeting civil society, and to a wider spectrum of digital threats – including surveillance, internet shutdowns, platform-related restrictions, cybercrime and online-safety legislation used to curtail civic activity. These areas will require more sustained and co-ordinated attention in the future.

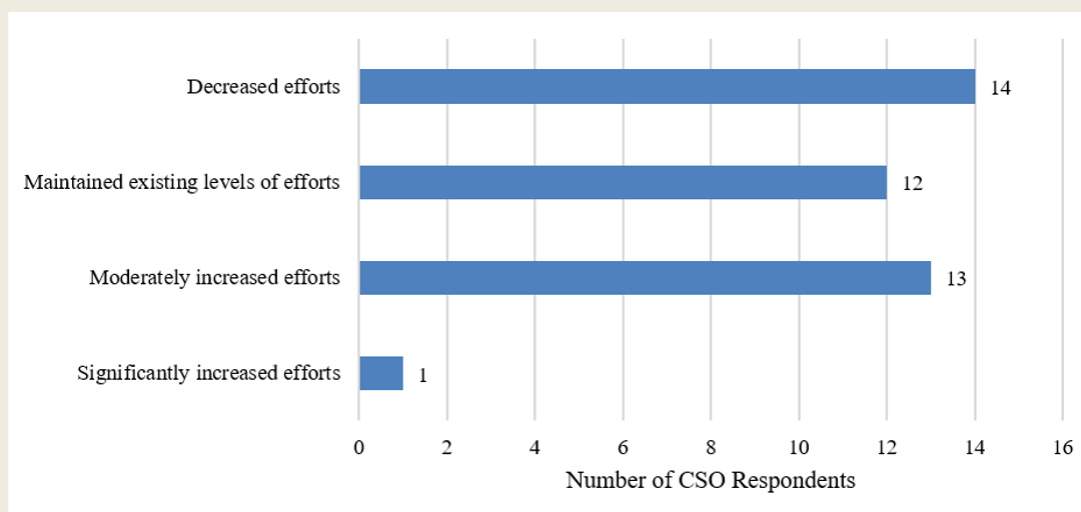
Box 3.1. CSOs' perspectives on Adherents' efforts to implement Pillar 1

According to CSO questionnaire responses and inputs received through consultations, CSOs acknowledge Adherents' meaningful progress in updating and adopting policies relating to civil society and civic space in line with Pillar 1 of the DAC Recommendation, since its adoption. However, CSOs also noted that recent cuts to ODA and the shrinking of civic space across both provider and partner countries have made it increasingly difficult for Adherents to sustain this progress.

In the CSO questionnaire, 14 CSO Respondents reported that DAC members' efforts to respect, protect and promote civic space have decreased since 2021, while 13 reported these efforts had moderately increased, 12 reported they had been maintained, and 1

CSO Respondent reported they had significantly increased (Figure 3.4). These mixed findings point to a pattern identified by CSOs in consultations, whereby they have observed an initial phase of progress in policy development following the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, followed by a scaling back of funding and co-ordination initiatives in more recent years due to budget constraints and shifts in providers' political priorities.

Figure 3.4. CSO Respondents on the extent to which DAC members' efforts to respect, protect, and promote civic space have changed since 2021



Note: 37 CSO Respondents to the question: “To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to respect, protect, and promote civic space since 2021?”. As respondents could select more than one answer, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents. Source: CSO questionnaire.

Across the CSO questionnaire and in consultations, CSOs acknowledged that most Adherents have developed clear policy positions affirming the value of civil society and civic space since 2021. These include policies, strategies and programmes which emphasise support to vulnerable and marginalised groups such as WROs, HRDs, activists and journalists, among others. CSO Respondents also noted that, as a result of such strategies, some DAC members have incorporated civic space promotion into programme evaluation criteria, which represents a significant step towards mainstreaming enabling environment considerations across development programming. Adherents' financing of international and regional events that facilitate CSO participation was also highlighted as a valuable contribution to independent civil society engagement, peer learning and evidence sharing.

CSO Respondents recognised that DAC members have maintained efforts to raise awareness of the value of civic space and civil society, notably through dissemination of the DAC Recommendation, dedicated funding instruments, and supporting civil society actors' participation in regional and international fora. In the consultations, CSOs stressed that future initiatives for awareness raising on civic space should be conducted in genuine partnership with civil society actors and should focus on evidence-based advocacy and GCE as tools for countering mis- and disinformation and fostering support for civil society.

A key point stressed by CSOs is that reduction in ODA budgets has led to a significant decrease in funding allocated to civic space programmes, as well as in overall funding for civil society. This reduction in funding and in provider co-ordination has had significant consequences on the operational capacity of CSOs globally, with the scaling back or closing of programmes and initiatives having direct implications for the employment, livelihoods and security of civil society actors in both provider and partner countries. The impacts of funding cuts have been particularly severe for civil society in restrictive contexts, as well as for vulnerable and marginalised groups including HRDs, activists, and women's and disability groups, among others. Reduced funding to such civil society groups has direct implications for their ability to promote human rights and civic freedoms, hold governments accountable and contribute to inclusive and sustainable development.

However, amidst ongoing cuts to civil society funding, several CSO Respondents recognised that some Adherents have maintained a valuable window of support for civil society in fragile and politically constrained settings, especially for at-risk actors such as WROs, HRDs and independent media.

Civil society has also mobilised its own resources to respond directly to funding gaps left by ODA cuts. For example, the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund, financed through CIVICUS' own membership contributions, provides flexible re-granting to civil society actors that struggle to access mainstream donor channels, including small, informal, unregistered or recently established organisations, and groups led by historically marginalised communities (CIVICUS, n.d.^[71]).

CSOs further noted that shrinking civic space in both provider and partner countries has complicated Adherents' ability to engage with partner-country governments on these issues, given the risk that such engagement may be perceived as foreign interference – a dynamic which CSOs linked to growing questions about the credibility of providers' efforts to promote civic space abroad while imposing domestic restrictions on civil society.

CSOs praised Adherents' support to and engagement with CSO-led initiatives focusing on civic space monitoring and analysis. The EU SEE – a consortium of international and local CSOs, including Hivos, CIVICUS, Forus and Transparency International – which tracks legal, financial, political and digital threats and opportunities affecting civil society's enabling environment across 86 countries – was acknowledged by both Adherents and CSOs as a key initiative providing necessary data on civic space for early and co-ordinated action to prevent its closure (EU SEE, n.d.^[36]). Adherents reportedly draw on country-level findings from the EU SEE and other CSO-generated evidence – such as the monitoring conducted by CIVICUS and V-Dem Institute – to guide their engagement with partner-country governments and their support to civil society actors. While CSO Respondents recognised that the speed at which restrictions are emerging in partner countries can make preventive action challenging for providers, they also stressed that Adherents should make better use of CSO-led monitoring and early-warning data to anticipate and prevent the contraction of civic space. They argued that Adherents' programming and engagement with partner-country governments and civil society should be triggered in response to emerging risks, informed by CSO alerts and monitoring. Such informed programming and engagement could involve identifying relevant triggers of civic space restrictions – such as the drafting of restrictive laws, internet shutdowns, foreign-funding restrictions, misuse of AML/CFT measures, smear campaigns, and attacks on human rights defenders or journalists – and establishing a menu of context-appropriate responses including co-ordinated diplomatic engagement,

joint messaging, legal and digital protection, rapid or adapted grants, and targeted support for at-risk civil society actors.

Finally, CSO Respondents acknowledged that some Adherents have taken steps to address mis- and disinformation affecting civil society, notably through support to capacity-strengthening projects focused on digital technologies and for dialogue platforms promoting civil society participation with the aim of countering hostile narratives through awareness raising. However, CSOs noted that there is insufficient co-ordination on this topic, and that only a few Adherents have developed targeted strategies jointly with civil society to actively counter mis- and disinformation, harassment and anti-democratic narratives. Furthermore, CSOs stressed that despite the growing use of digital repression, there is slow adaptation among Adherents, with limited and predominantly ad hoc support for civil society's digital security, legal defence and online resilience. In the context of increasing digital repression and disinformation campaigns targeting CSOs, CSO Respondents identified targeted support for CSOs' online safety and resilience as a key area of opportunity for stronger provider co-ordination to more effectively support civil society.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

Overarching implementation challenges for Pillar 1

96. In their implementation of Pillar 1 on respecting, protecting and promoting civic space, Adherents face a range of overarching challenges summarised as follows:

- declining ODA and changing policy priorities, which have reduced funding for civic space programmes and have substantially affected CSOs' operational capacities;
- increasing restrictions on civic space in both provider and partner countries – including repression, digital threats, and legislative or regulatory barriers – further constraining the environment in which CSOs operate;
- shifting and shrinking civic space, which affects CSO actors unevenly while also giving rise to new forms of civic action; and
- misalignment in policy coherence, institutional changes and political uncertainties, combined with a lack of a narrative on the value of civil society and civic space.

97. This section outlines these challenges in greater detail.

98. First, the main challenge acknowledged by Adherents and CSOs, across both the questionnaires and consultations, is funding constraints. DAC members are facing significant cuts to ODA, with net ODA declining by 8.5% in 2024 and 23.3% in 2025, and projected to decrease by 6.9% in 2026 (OECD, 2026^[72]). Simultaneously, DAC members have experienced a re-orientation of foreign and development policy priorities, with a growing emphasis on security, defence and economic investments. In this context, most DAC members have reduced funding available for civil society, with total ODA for CSOs falling by 2.35% in 2024 – marking its first decline since 2018 [DCD(2026)4] (OECD, 2026^[13]). Several DAC members have also shifted strategic approach, from focusing on civic space as a standalone programming priority towards integrating it as a cross-cutting consideration which is monitored across programmes – a shift which has been associated with reduced dedicated funding for civic space programmes according to Adherent Respondents. In fact, evidence shows that amid budget cuts, provider programmes focusing on civil liberties and human rights were among those facing the greatest reductions in funding (HRFN, 2025^[73]). In 2025, ODA for government and civil society (which consists

of sub-sectors pertaining to human rights, democratic participation and public-sector reform) is projected to fall by 39.8%, a decline largely driven by sharp reductions in Ukraine, which received 37.8% of this sector's ODA in 2024 (OECD, 2026^[72]). The shifting priorities among providers, combined with the overall decrease in civil society funding, have led to many CSOs having to adapt their mandate and/or conclude certain programming to be eligible for funding (Accountability Lab, 2026^[74]).

99. Cuts to ODA have significantly impacted CSOs' operational capacities, especially for smaller and partner-country CSOs. According to a global survey of CSOs by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 84% lost funding in 2025 and anticipated further cuts to their budgets in 2026 (IFES, 2026^[75]). Other surveys have demonstrated that budget cuts led many CSOs to close and interrupt operations as they were not able to find alternative revenue sources (EU SEE, 2025^[76]; UN Women, 2025^[77]). Faced with such budget cuts, CSOs in both their questionnaire responses and in consultations stressed that the retreat of providers from restrictive, fragile and conflict-affected contexts can compound harm where civic space is already restricted, especially when no alternative support is put in place, leaving local civil society actors with heightened risks and fewer protective channels. Furthermore, CSO Respondents stressed that budget cuts limited the ability of DAC members to provide flexible, core and multi-year funding, which has direct implications on civil society actors' ability to cover costs related to physical, legal and digital security. A 2025 TrustLaw survey found evidence of a growing need for legal support among surveyed CSOs, especially smaller organisations, with 36% identifying restrictive regulations and 34% funding cuts as the main drivers of their increased legal needs (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2025^[78]). In addition, reduced funding to civil society may have repercussions on civic space in partner countries, as highlighted by Pact's global CSO survey, which found that CSOs widely anticipate civic space to shrink in their country following aid cuts (Pact, 2025^[79]). This is because sustained cuts in support to civil society may erode CSOs' capacity to organise, defend human rights, hold institutions accountable and advance sustainable development.

100. Second, increasing restrictions on civic space across both provider and partner countries are making the implementation of Pillar 1 increasingly challenging. According to ICNL, 74 countries have proposed or enacted more than 323 legal initiatives affecting civic freedoms since 2021, 85% of which were restrictive [DCD(2026)3] (OECD, 2025^[80])⁹. CIVICUS has reported an overall closing of civic space worldwide. Its monitoring tool with real-time data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries, has tracked growing restrictions both across provider and partner countries, and a narrowing of civic space within several DAC member countries in recent years (CIVICUS, 2025^[81]).

101. Institutions and organisations monitoring civic space have identified a growing number of restrictions on peaceful assembly, association and freedom of expression across DAC member countries, with implications for the enabling environment in which CSOs operate. According to data from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), in 2024, 67% of surveyed CSOs in the EU reported facing online verbal threats or attacks over the previous year, 60% faced negative media reports or campaigns, and 21% criminalisation of the work of the CSO or of an employee or volunteer (FRA, 2026^[82]). CSO-led monitoring has found that protests and social movements in some DAC member countries have become increasingly controlled and restricted, while attacks on media freedom have grown, with cases of legal harassment, threats and intimidation of journalists reported in several provider countries (De Benedetti, 2026^[83]; CIVICUS, 2023^[84]; Media Freedom Rapid Response, 2025^[85]). These threats and attacks against civil society actors have also

⁹ Updated data was provided by ICNL during written consultations in June 2026.

been found to be taking place alongside a delegitimisation of civil society through smear campaigns aimed at painting CSOs as politically driven, opaque and inefficient (European Civic Forum, 2025^[86]). In this context of civic space restrictions within provider countries, Adherent and CSO Respondents acknowledged that the legitimacy and coherence of providers' efforts to promote and protect civic space in partner countries risks being questioned.

102. According to the V-Dem Institute, repression of civil society has also surged across partner countries, worsening substantially in two-thirds of autocratising countries (V-Dem Institute, 2026^[87]). Across partner countries, peaceful protests have been increasingly restricted, with an increase in the detention of protesters, and with mounting cases of arrests and excessive force (V-Dem Institute, 2026^[87]). CIVICUS has found that the prosecution of HRDs grew between 2019 and 2023, with this trend being particularly pronounced in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, and other vulnerable and marginalised groups being disproportionately targeted, such as environmental and land rights defenders and women HRDs (CIVICUS, 2024^[88]). Partner-country governments have also increasingly relied on a recurring set of legal and administrative tools to constrain civil society, including denial or revocation of CSO registration, foreign-agent and foreign-funding laws, CSO-specific financial reporting requirements, and the use of cybercrime, anti-terrorism and national-security legislation against activists and organisations (CIVICUS, 2024^[88]).

103. In the context of shrinking civic space in partner countries, Adherent Respondents cited legislative or regulatory barriers, such as rules requiring prior government approval of foreign funding or that oblige civil society actors receiving foreign funding to register as “foreign agents” as key obstacles to implementation (ICNL, n.d.^[89]). Foreign-agent laws result in reduced financial support from both partner and provider countries, exclusion from dialogue and consultation opportunities, harassment by government authorities, and targeted stigmatisation and dis-information campaigns (Pardavi, n.d.^[90]). Restrictive laws against civil society make it particularly challenging for providers to support local partners, with evidence demonstrating a significant reduction in providers' support for democracy promotion following the introduction of restrictive regulation (Right, Springman and Wibbels, 2025^[91]). Furthermore, these restrictive measures subject civil society actors to significant security risks and psychological harm, and force CSOs to divert a significant portion of their already limited resources to comply with restrictive laws and to counter smear campaigns rather than focus on their programmatic priorities. In order to effectively protect civil society actors in restrictive contexts, CSO Respondents underlined the need for targeted support to be provided, to ensure civil society actors' security via, for example, contingency and emergency funds as well as the inclusion of digital safety and legal defence as eligible costs.

104. Furthermore, in such restrictive contexts, Adherent Respondents noted that efforts to protect civic space – particularly when supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups such as HRDs, faith-based organisations (FBOs), WROs, unions and journalists – may be perceived as foreign interference by partner-country governments. Therefore, DAC members' engagement on civic space issues in restrictive contexts may potentially affect bilateral relations with partner countries and heighten security risks for foreign-funded CSOs operating locally. To manage such risks, Adherent Respondents reported having adapted the way they support partner-country CSOs in restrictive contexts, such as by supporting smaller and grassroots CSOs as well as informal civil society actors, and supporting thematic programmes such as on culture, education, media diversity and social entrepreneurship (Bouchet, Godfrey and Youngs, 2022^[92]), integrating civic space messages within them. While such adaptations are, in certain contexts, necessary to mitigate risks, they should be developed in consultation with affected civil society actors

and should not substitute programming that supports civil society's role as democracy and accountability actors.

105. A third key challenge in the implementation of Pillar 1 has been the evolution of civic space in light of digital transformation. On one hand, digital tools have allowed civil society to transform the way it organises and mobilises, facilitating co-ordination and the dissemination and exchange of information, and enabling the emergence or strengthening of transnational social movements (OECD, 2020^[4]). However, digital tools have also been harnessed to restrict civic space through online censorship, internet shutdowns, platform-based restrictions, digital surveillance and disinformation (Schächtele et al., 2022^[93]). Faced with the scaling down of several co-ordination mechanisms due to funding cuts, Adherent Respondents stressed the need to strengthen provider co-ordination and joint programming on civic space, with several highlighting the value of greater provider co-ordination in addressing digital threats, through programming addressing digital safety, media literacy, and fact checking, especially for independent media and journalists. Given the growing delegitimisation of civil society, driven by governmental restrictions on civic space and growing mis- and disinformation targeting civil society and CSOs, GCE was identified by both Adherents and CSOs as a way to strengthen public understanding of and support for civil society and civic space both in provider and partner countries.

106. Through the questionnaire and in consultations, several Adherents and CSOs argued that the phenomenon observed across provider and partner countries is not only a “shrinking” of civic space, but also “shifting” civic space. This acknowledgement of civic space “shifting” is not intended to question the reality or severity of ongoing restrictions happening in both provider and partner countries. Rather, it aims to shed light on other dynamics affecting civic space in recent years. First, restrictions on civic space have not been uniform, impacting different types of civil society actors in various ways. Some civil society actors – including HRDs, activists, journalists, and labour unionists – are more targeted by restrictions and intimidation, while others are supported and prioritised by governments (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2021^[94]). For certain vulnerable and marginalised groups – including indigenous communities and WROs – civic space may not have been meaningfully open prior to recent restrictions, such that a narrative of “shrinking” does not fully capture their situation. Second, civil society has and continues to evolve in terms of both the actors involved and the methods used to organise themselves. New types of actors have emerged that go beyond traditional formal CSOs, such as social movements, youth movements, digital activist networks, and the growing presence of groups that do not operate according to democratic values, social justice and human rights (Carothers, 2019^[95]; Youngs, 2018^[96]). On the latter, while both Adherents and CSOs recognised the importance of acknowledging the full diversity of civil society actors representing a range of interests and beliefs and that not all of them have a common mandate, they underscored that the DAC Recommendation focuses on actors “that hold positive social and/or democratic values” [DCD/DAC(2021)17]. Civil society has also adopted a range of organisational and behavioural adaptations in response to such restrictions, including increased reliance on informal or community-based structures, greater use of digital platforms to sustain mobilisation and information sharing, and, in some cases, a shift towards service delivery as a means of preserving operational capacity under restrictive conditions and/or faced with ongoing budget reductions among providers (Sharp, Diepeveen and Collins, 2023^[97]; Richards, 2025^[98]; Youngs, Milanese and Nicolaïdis, 2022^[99]; Hadden and Teixeira, 2026^[100]). The concept of “shifting” civic space can be useful in highlighting how restrictions affect different actors unevenly and that new forms of civic action are emerging.

107. A fourth key challenge to implementation concerns the coherence between Adherents' commitments to enabling civil society and protecting civic space abroad and

their domestic policies in these and other areas, including migration, security, foreign investment, trade, development finance, financial regulation and digital governance. Where these domestic policies are misaligned with commitments under the DAC Recommendation, this can undermine its implementation and weaken progress on enabling civil society more broadly. Strengthening policy coherence is a theme of the OECD *Coordinating Action for Civic Space* toolkit (OECD, 2025^[11]). Moreover it is the explicit subject of the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development [[OECD/LEGAL/0381](#)], under the joint responsibility of the DAC and the PGC, which calls on Adherents to develop institutional mechanisms, tools and processes – including stronger cross-ministerial co-ordination – to ensure that domestic policies across different government departments do not work at cross-purposes to one another in pursuit of broader sustainable development objectives, including the enabling of civil society.

108. In addition, according to Adherent Respondents, institutional changes including policy shifts, staff turnover and political instabilities – in partner and provider countries alike – may delay and create uncertainties in co-ordination and may result in a lack of continuity in efforts related to civic space. Adherent Respondents stressed that this is especially true in cases where the civic space agenda depends on a limited number of staff or on a single institutional unit in provider countries, making staff turnover or institutional shifts particularly destabilising for the continuity of co-operation on civic space between providers and partners. Differing cultural views and a limited understanding of what civic space and civil society are, according to Adherent Respondents, may also have implications on the extent to which providers can effectively co-operate with partner-country governments and mobilise public awareness of and support for civil society.

109. Overall, CSOs recognised in consultations that civic space restrictions rarely occur through single measures but instead result from the cumulative effect of legal, financial, administrative and digital constraints that reinforce one another over time. Civic space should therefore not be treated as a standalone issue, but as a cross-cutting concern relevant across sectors.

110. Finally, Adherent and CSO Respondents also stressed the need for providers to promote a narrative on the strategic value of civil society and civic space for sustainable development, including through diplomatic engagement with partner countries and GCE to counter mis- and disinformation, polarisation, and declining public trust in civil society in partner and provider countries. Some Adherent Respondents recognised that further efforts should be dedicated to partnering with both provider and partner-country CSOs to raise awareness on the value of civil society and civic space, as a way to tackle declining trust in both provider and partner countries. Furthermore, both Adherent and CSO Respondents encouraged greater engagement of DAC members with a wide range of actors including non-DAC providers, development banks, philanthropic institutions and the private sector, as a way of integrating enabling environment analysis across development co-operation and investment instruments.

3.2. Pillar 2: Supporting and engaging with civil society

III. RECOMMENDS that Adherents, when acting in their roles as development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers, support and engage with civil society [...]

111. The second Pillar of the DAC Recommendation focuses on strengthening Adherents' support for and engagement with civil society as a core component of effective development co-operation and humanitarian assistance. The DAC Recommendation defines civil society as “uncoerced human association or interaction by which individuals

implement individual or collective action to address shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs that they have identified in common,” encompassing formal, semi-formal and non-formal actors and differentiating it from civil society is distinct from states, private for profit enterprises, and the family. [OECD/LEGAL/5021].¹⁰

112. The second Pillar calls on Adherents to: adopt inclusive policies and strategies for working with a diverse range of civil society actors; ensure meaningful civil society participation in policy development and consultation in programme cycles; and provide financial support to diverse civil society actors, particularly those representing the most vulnerable or marginalised, through the availability of flexible, multi-year and core support. Pillar 2 further emphasises the importance of reducing administrative burdens, supporting civil society networks and platforms, engaging with emerging and non-traditional civil society actors, and working in partnership with civil society to advance GCE, uphold international humanitarian and human rights standards, and address unintended consequences on civil society arising from the misinterpretation or misapplication of AML and CTF standards.

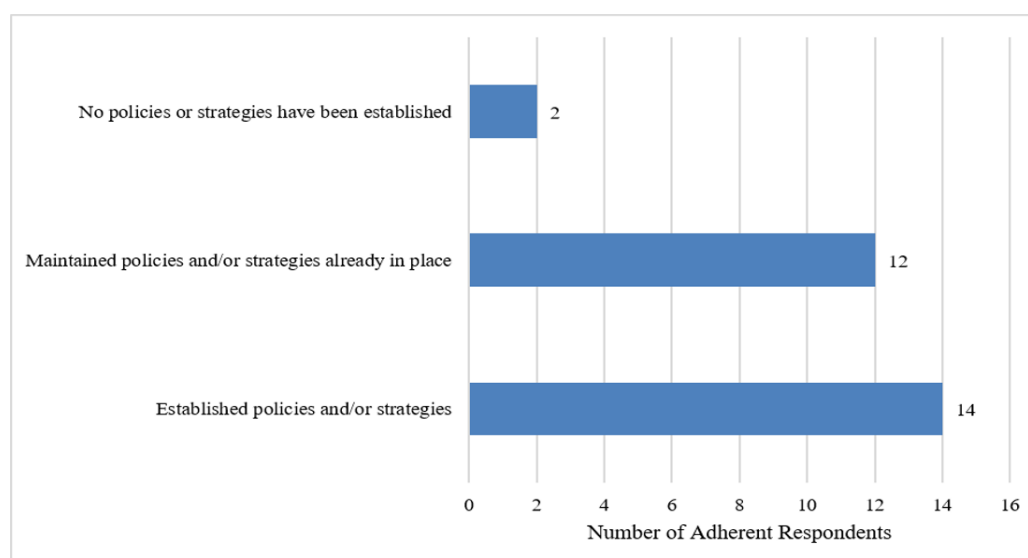
1. Establish, in consultation with civil society, policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner countries or territories and provider countries that:

- a. articulate objectives for working with a diverse range of civil society actors both as independent development and humanitarian actors in their own right and as implementing partners;*
- b. aim to strengthen local ownership and an inclusive and independent civil society in partner countries or territories;*
- c. take into account contextual risks or opportunities for civil society and civic spaces; and*
- d. integrate these policy or strategy positions into wider development co-operation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding policies or strategies.*

113. Fourteen Adherent Respondents reported that they had established policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner and provider countries, while 12 maintained those already in place and 2 reported none being established (Figure 3.5). These take the form of strategies or policies on civil society, guidelines and programmes addressing partnerships with civil society, and legislation including laws or decrees on development co-operation or engagement with civil society (see Pillar 1, provision 1). Examples from Adherent Respondents include strategies guiding providers’ collaboration with CSOs, strategic partnership agreements that establish longer-term co-operation with CSOs, and legislative frameworks governing national development co-operation and defining the role of CSOs as partners for sustainable development.

¹⁰ The DAC Recommendation also defines CSO as seen in Section 3.3 of this Report.

Figure 3.5. Extent to which Adherent Respondents have established policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner countries and provider countries



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “Have you established policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner countries and provider countries?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

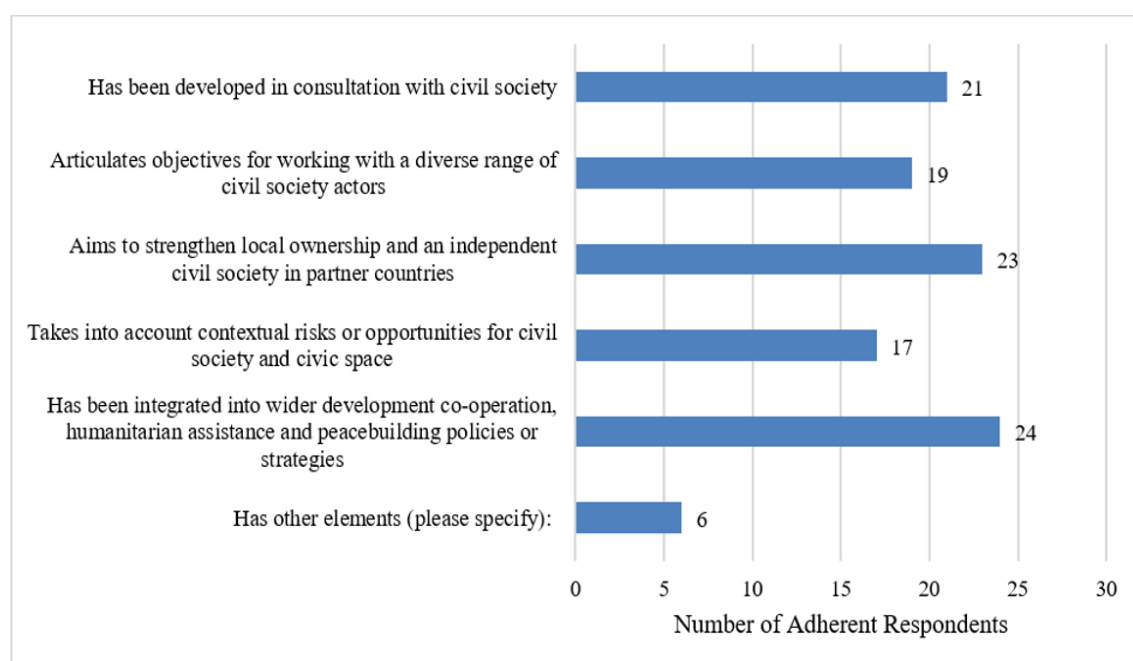
Source: Adherent questionnaire.

114. Strategies guiding Adherents’ collaboration with CSOs include Sweden’s Strategy for Development Cooperation with Civil Society 2025-2029, which aims to strengthen civil society in partner countries while also increasing the share of Sweden’s support reaching partner-country CSOs (Government of Sweden, 2024^[101]). Denmark has established strategic partnerships as a way to implement the Danish Strategy on Development Cooperation 2021-2025 through mutually reinforcing partnerships between Danish and partner-country CSOs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.^[102]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.^[103]). France’s Strategic Guidance Paper on Civil Society and Civic Engagement 2023-2027 was developed through a participatory process across ministries and with civil society, which explicitly recognised CSOs both as implementing partners and independent development actors in their own right, while aiming to support the enabling environment for civil society and empower civil society actors (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2025^[18]). Spain’s Framework for Relations between Development Non-Governmental Organisations and the General State Administration aims to strengthen co-operation by enhancing CSO engagement across all stages, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and improving standards of transparency, effectiveness, accountability and security (Government of Spain, 2022^[104]). Japan’s Development Cooperation Charter 2023 also identifies civil society as a strategic partner in reaching underserved populations (Government of Japan, 2023^[105]). Legislative frameworks including Italy’s Law n. 125/2014 (Government of Italy, 2014^[28]) and Spain’s Law No. 1/2023 (Government of Spain, 2023^[27]), which govern their development co-operation systems, recognise and define the role of CSOs as key actors in development and humanitarian aid by defining their role as implementing partners in pursuing sustainable development (see Pillar 1, provision 1).

115. Twenty-four Adherent Respondents have integrated their policy or strategy positions into wider development co-operation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding policies or strategies. Within their civil society policies and strategies, 23 Adherent

Respondents aim to strengthen local ownership and an independent civil society in partner countries, 19 articulate objectives for working with a diverse range of civil society actors, 17 take into account contextual risks or opportunities for civil society and civic space and 6 include other elements. Importantly, 21 Adherent Respondents have developed these policies and strategies in consultation with civil society (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Characteristics of Adherent Respondents’ policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner countries and provider countries



Note: 25 Adherent Respondents to the question “If yes, or have maintained a policy or strategy already in place, does it contain any of the following elements?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents. This question acted as a follow-up for Adherent Respondents who checked “Maintained policies and/or strategies already in place” or “Yes, established policies and/or strategies” under the question shown under Figure 3.5.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

116. Across their policies and strategies, several Adherent Respondents have established advisory groups with CSOs to guide implementation and have developed implementation plans in consultation with civil society. Adherent Respondents also reported that policies and strategies for working with civil society are supported by consistent dialogue with civil society actors both through ad hoc and structured engagement mechanisms, which specifically aim to engage CSO co-ordination bodies including platforms, networks and associations. In fact, CSO networks and platforms from both partner and provider countries were raised as key actors in the implementation of policies and strategies regarding working with civil society, as they serve as aggregators of expertise and knowledge and can ensure broad representation of civil society actors.

117. For example, Canada’s Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance 2017, led to the adoption of an implementation plan co-developed with the CSO Policy Advisory Group (CPAG), composed of both government and civil society representatives (Government of Canada, n.d.^[41]; Government of Canada, n.d.^[106]). The CPAG discusses and monitors progress related to the implementation of Canada’s policy

on CSO partnerships, and the implementation of the DAC Recommendation across Canada's development co-operation system (OECD, 2023^[107]).

118. Furthermore, several Adherent Respondents mentioned that their approach to working with civil society is in line with the HDP Nexus, which requires close collaboration with civil society to ensure context-sensitive programming in fragile settings. Adherent Respondents also highlighted partnership agreements that enable effective co-operation with established provider-country CSOs, such as Denmark's strategic partnerships (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.^[102]), Iceland's framework agreements (OECD, 2025^[108]), New Zealand's Partnering for Impact initiative (OECD, 2023^[109]), and the EU's Financial Framework Partnership Agreements (FFPAs) established with a number of EU and international CSO networks (European Commission, n.d.^[110]). These rely on flexible, multi-year funding to build trust and leverage CSO expertise through adaptive management.

119. In conclusion, a significant majority of Adherent Respondents reported having established or maintained policies and strategies for working with civil society, primarily developed in consultation with civil society, that incorporate the key elements set out in the DAC Recommendation, including aiming to strengthen local ownership and an independent civil society. However, the level of institutionalisation and inclusivity of civil society consultations is often limited, as consultations are typically held in an ad hoc manner throughout strategy implementation, with limited representation of partner-country CSOs and grassroots civil society actors. Furthermore, a majority of these policies and strategies focus on Adherents' co-operation with established provider-country CSOs, with significantly fewer focusing on direct engagement with and funding for partner-country CSOs. Going forward, Adherents should aim to institutionalise consultation processes to ensure accountability not only in the development phase, but also in the implementation and evaluation stages. Furthermore, Adherents should also work to broaden participation to include partner-country CSOs, grassroots civil society actors and beneficiary communities more meaningfully, so that resulting programmes and strategies are responsive to local needs and priorities.

2. Pursue civil society actors' participation, especially in partner countries or territories where appropriate and feasible, in Adherents' policy and programme priority-setting, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation through more structured, institutionalised, inclusive and accessible dialogue, including with parliaments, the private sector and the public.

120. Twelve Adherent Respondents have moderately increased participation of diverse civil society actors in their policies and programmes, such as through involvement in priority-setting, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Another 12 Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of participation, while 3 reported having significantly increased participation (Figure 3.7).

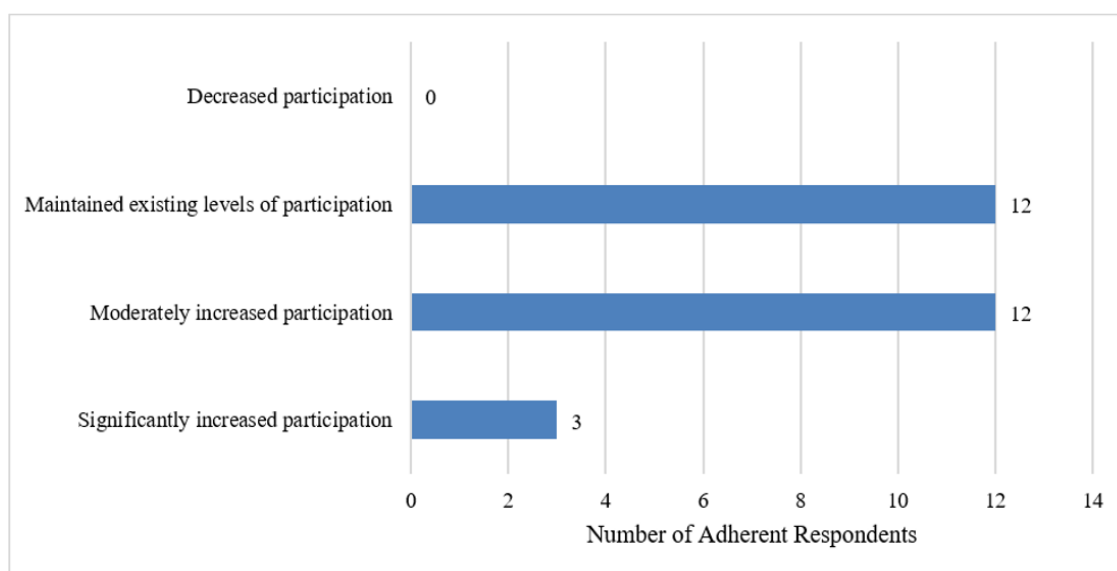
121. Some Adherent Respondents highlighted their aim to transition from ad hoc consultations towards a more structured and institutionalised engagement, focusing on integrating the engagement of provider and partner-country CSOs at earlier stages of the project cycle, and maintaining it throughout priority and agenda setting, programme design, implementation and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL).

122. Several Adherent Respondents specified having increased engagement with partner-country CSOs to ensure alignment with local needs and priorities, such as through engagement with partner-country CSO platforms and networks. Several Adherent Respondents highlighted that their calls for proposals explicitly require provider-country CSOs to collaborate with partner-country CSOs including through consortia agreements,

while others have established funding calls explicitly for partner-country CSOs as lead applicants. Overall, Adherent Respondents highlighted a growing emphasis on engaging provider-country, international and partner-country CSOs throughout the programming cycle, as well as through participation in the development of higher-level policies and programmes through participation in dialogues, working groups and roundtables.

123. Examples include Estonia's Development Co-operation Advisory Council, established under the Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy 2024-2030, which brings together civil society, the private sector and academia to discuss Estonia's development co-operation (Government of Estonia, n.d.^[16]). Similarly, the Co-ordination Committee for Development Co-operation of the Slovak Republic convenes several times a year to discuss policy development and priorities in development co-operation and ensures engagement of CSO representatives co-ordinated under Ambrella, the national umbrella CSO working on development co-operation and humanitarian assistance (OECD, 2025^[111]).

Figure 3.7. Extent to which the participation of diverse civil society actors in Adherent Respondents' policies and programmes has changed since 2021



Note: 25 Adherent Respondents to the question “How has the participation of diverse civil society actors in your policies and programmes (e.g. priority-setting, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) changed?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

124. Japan has established several structured mechanisms for dialogue and engagement with civil society, including the NGO-MOFA Regular Consultation Meeting – comprising a plenary and two subcommittees on ODA policy and partnership promotion – as a standing forum for exchange with CSOs. The Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) complements this through its biannual NGO-JICA Dialogue Meeting and by operating Japan Desks in several partner countries, aiming to support the activities of Japanese CSOs in partner countries and foster their co-operation with partner-country CSOs.

125. In 2014, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs established the National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI), a multistakeholder forum composed of CSOs, trade unions, businesses, social enterprises,

MPs, local governments, academia and foundations which meets three times a year to discuss French development policy (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2026^[112]). In addition, working groups of the CNDSI study cross-cutting themes and produce recommendations to inform the drafting of strategies and policies. Since the body's establishment, twelve working groups have been led by civil society. One of these groups, dedicated to fostering an enabling environment for civil society, produced a strategy report in 2020 through a consultative process involving CNDSI representatives (CNDSI, 2020^[113]). France has also employed participatory processes for the development of the International Strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy 2025-2030, elaborated with the involvement of over 200 stakeholders including French and partner-country CSOs, international CSOs, research institutions and philanthropic foundations (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2026^[114]).

126. Canada has strengthened engagement with civil society through expanded engagement and dialogue mechanisms under GAC's Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative (GCTI) since 2023 (Government of Canada, n.d.^[115]), including partner forums and innovative exercises such as the Risk Appetite Hackathon, which convened GAC staff and over 350 Canadian, international and partner-country CSOs to explore innovative solutions for integrating greater risk awareness into grants and programming (Global Affairs Canada, 2024^[116]), and the FailSmart Lab, which tested priorities and recommendations of the Hackathon (OECD, 2026^[117]). It also maintains sustained engagement with civil society through the CPAG, supporting ongoing monitoring of its CSO partnership policy (see Pillar 2, provision 1).

127. The EU has established dialogue mechanisms, including the EU Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society, produced jointly by EU Delegations and EU Member States at the partner-country level, which analyse the civil society landscape and political-economy context and establish a framework for engaging civil society in policy dialogue across priority sectors. The fourth generation of Roadmaps (2025-2027) aligns more closely with the five Global Gateway priority sectors (digital, energy/climate, health, education, transport) to ensure civil society engagement throughout the investment project cycle. The EU also established the Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform in 2023 to support implementation of the Joint Communication on the Global Gateway by incorporating the perspectives, recommendations and knowledge of civil society and local authorities (European Commission, n.d.^[118]; European Commission, 2021^[119]). The self-organised platform brings together representatives from international, provider-country and partner-country CSOs, as well as associations representing local authorities and businesses.

128. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents have demonstrated a commitment to increasing civil society actors' participation, with a majority having either moderately or significantly increased participation in their policies and programmes. The responses indicate a trend towards increasing participation of partner-country CSOs and a commitment to more structured and institutionalised engagement throughout the policy and programme cycle, including through joint priority and agenda setting and the co-design of programmes. However, meaningful participation of partner-country CSOs, grassroots organisations and informal actors continues to represent a significant challenge for Adherents, as these actors often lack the resources, information, internet access, travel support or safety guarantees to participate in providers' engagement opportunities. Therefore, Adherents must focus efforts not only on providing opportunities for engagement, but also ensuring these are accessible, safe, and potentially impactful through advance notice, accessible formats, language support and interpretation, coverage of participation costs, safe channels for input, and transparent feedback loops on whether and how CSO inputs have informed decision-making.

3. Provide financial support to diverse civil society actors as independent development and humanitarian actors in their own right as well as to civil society actors as implementing partners, particularly those representing persons in the most vulnerable or marginalised positions by, where appropriate and feasible, increasing the availability of flexible and predictable support, core support and/or programme-based support.

129. Fourteen Adherent Respondents reported having moderately increased flexible and predictable financial support to diverse civil society actors, while 9 have maintained existing levels of support and 3 Adherent Respondents each have either significantly increased support, decreased support or provided no support. While responses indicate improvements in funding modalities, these nonetheless contrast with the overall decrease in funding for civil society recorded across DAC members due to disproportionate decreases by select DAC members and because support levels may have shifted within the five-year reporting period; for instance, increasing initially before being reduced later on.

130. Adherent Respondents who have moderately or significantly increased financial support highlighted a growing emphasis on multi-year funding, with several initiatives aiming to provide more stable financing to partner-country CSOs. Such predictable and long-term support tends to be provided through the form of strategic partnership agreements, which are often established with provider-country CSO networks. For example, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) establishes strategic partnerships or framework programmes with experienced Austrian CSOs, providing multi-year support of at least five years and simplified budgeting and flexibility for adjustments during implementation (ADA, n.d.^[120]).

131. Germany's 2025 guidelines for CSO support introduce greater flexibility, including programme extensions of up to five years, post-approval financial adjustments, and contingency provisions for unforeseen costs of up to 3.5% of overall eligible expenditure such as to cover staffing changes, natural disasters and crises (BMZ, 2025^[121]). They also provide targeted support for CSOs operating in countries with "closed" or "repressed" civic space according to the CIVICUS Monitor, by covering up to 90% of operating costs, compared to the standard coverage of 75%, to help offset higher risks and operational constraints (BMZ, 2025^[121]).

132. Italy has also increased direct and flexible funding for CSOs through its contribution to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPFs), enabling flexible and rapid funding for urgent humanitarian crises and emergencies. CERF is a global reserve fund replenished annually that enables the UN to respond immediately to crises, while CBPFs are a locally managed, unearmarked funding mechanisms that channel resources directly to priority projects implemented by frontline responders.

133. In addition, some Adherent Respondents highlighted initiatives aiming to increase flexible and predictable funding for specific themes or vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as women's organisations based in partner countries, as well as for partner-country CSOs operating in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. Iceland has increased the availability of flexible funding to support international CSOs working with partner-country CSOs on issues affecting certain vulnerable and marginalised groups and has sustained funding to the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which provides flexible and fast financing for interventions led by partner-country CSOs and grassroots organisations supporting women's participation and leadership in conflict-affected areas.

134. A number of Adherent Respondents also reported having introduced or piloted new approaches to making financial support more flexible and accessible, including

mechanisms that allow funding to be passed down more directly to partner-country CSOs (e.g. cascade funding via sub-grants), provisions that enable programmes to adapt rapidly to emerging crises, more accessible co-financing arrangements and greater recognition of in-kind contributions as part of required cost-sharing. Some Adherent Respondents have also taken steps to specifically make these mechanisms more accessible to smaller and more informal civil society actors, for example through smaller grants that can more easily be absorbed by such organisations. For example, Canada's Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Programme funds local and regional vulnerable and marginalised groups, providing multi-year core funding, rapid-response funding and institutional capacity strengthening (Government of Canada, n.d.^[122]).

135. However, flexible support to partner-country CSOs can also be implemented by addressing the co-operation modalities between provider and partner-country CSOs. The Australian NGO Co-operation Program (ANCP) provides flexible annual grants to accredited Australian CSOs, including an optional requirement to channel a portion of funding to local partners for administration and overhead costs to strengthen locally led development (LLD) (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, n.d.^[123]). Finland has adopted a flexible approach to funding CSOs, built around a four-year funding cycle. Once funding is approved, CSOs are not required to submit annual reapplications and may adjust their programming throughout the cycle to respond to evolving needs. Major changes to the programme and its budget lines require approval by Finland's MFA. The model allows up to 10% of funds to remain unallocated to specific budget lines, enabling rapid allocation to emerging priorities.

136. Ireland has established the Civil Society Partnership for A Better World (ICSP), which consolidates previously separate funding mechanisms for development, humanitarian and GCE programming into a single, coherent mechanism (Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, 2021^[124]). It supports experienced Irish CSOs in delivering long-term development programmes and appropriate responses in developing and fragile contexts. It incorporates flexibility by enabling responsive and adaptive programming and by pre-allocating funds at the beginning of each year, allowing rapid responses to humanitarian crises (OECD, 2023^[125]). The key purpose of the ICSP is to contribute to the priorities of Ireland's international development policy, A Better World, to reach the furthest behind first, including by strengthening LLD, through HDP Nexus approaches, and promoting civil society space (Irish Aid, 2019^[126]). Ireland's principal funding scheme for smaller CSOs, the Civil Society Fund, also provides for a multi-annual funding model, tailored to support the work of small to medium-sized organisations (Irish Aid, n.d.^[127]). Similarly, the Netherlands is advancing LLD by providing more flexible and predictable funding to CSO partners, particularly those engaged in humanitarian assistance, while encouraging such flexibility to be passed on to implementing partners. It also finances intermediary fund managers that support smaller and grassroots organisations, including social movements. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents recognised the importance of offering more flexible funding modalities for CSOs operating in crisis and conflict-affected settings. For example, the New Zealand Disaster Response Partnership (NZDRP) has introduced multi-year funding arrangements, improving predictability and enabling implementing CSOs to plan and allocate resources more effectively over time (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[128]).

137. In conclusion, the majority of Adherent Respondents report having either moderately increased or maintained flexible and predictable financial support to diverse civil society actors, reflecting meaningful progress since 2021 in the design of funding modalities, including through multi-year partnerships, cascade funding mechanisms, and adapted budget structures that offer CSOs greater flexibility and predictability. Nevertheless, significant progress is still needed, as in 2024 only 1% of total bilateral ODA

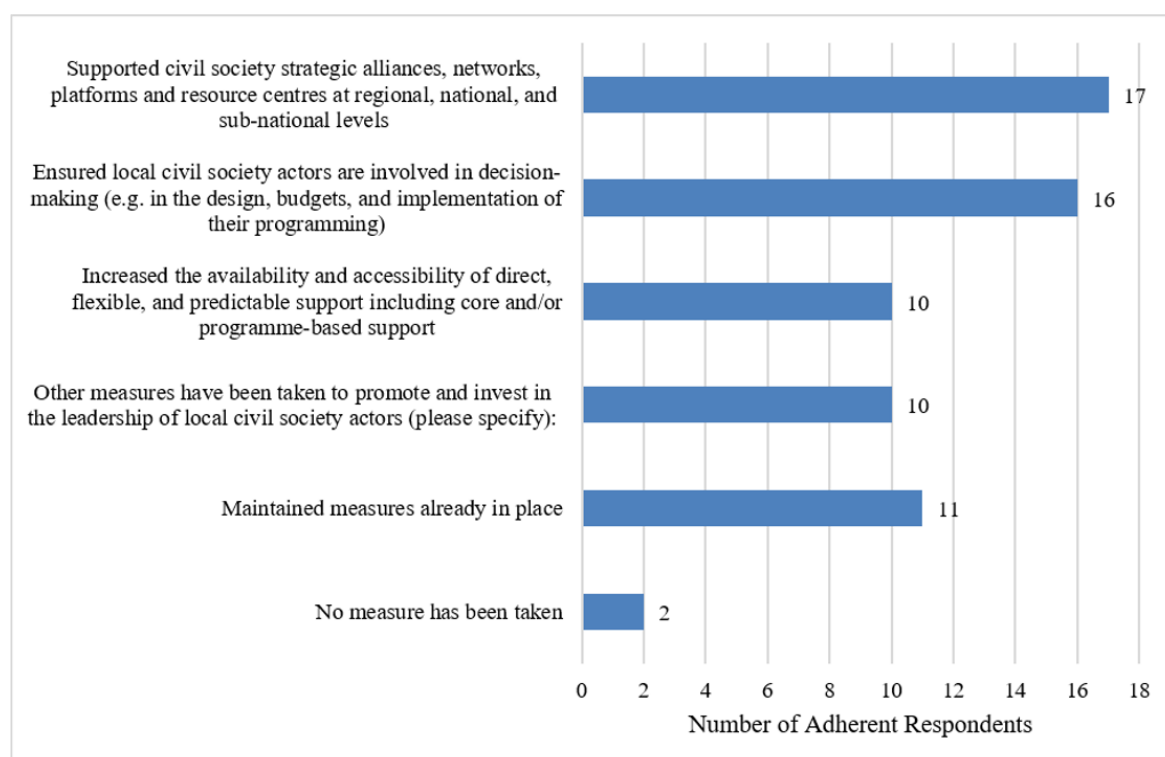
was allocated directly *to* CSOs, compared to 12% going *through* CSOs [DCD(2026)4]. Funding *to* CSOs is designated for CSOs to use at their own discretion and covers contributions to programmes and activities developed and implemented by CSOs, while funding *through* CSOs refers to funds provided to CSOs to implement provider-developed projects and programmes [DCD/DAC(2026)14/FINAL] (OECD, 2026^[129]). Furthermore, the provision of flexible and predictable support to partner-country CSOs is especially relevant as a means of deepening local ownership and advancing LLD. This is also important to protect and resource civil society's role in advocacy and its watchdog function in both in provider and partner countries. At the same time, ongoing ODA cuts are reducing the overall volume of funding available to civil society, which risks undermining the progress made in the predictability of funding as budget reductions translate into shorter funding cycles. This may also lead to an increase in earmarked funding through CSOs, raising concerns that funding constraints could result in providers prioritising their own objectives over locally defined priorities. However, reductions in the overall volume of funding need not compromise its quality. Even within constrained resource environments, it is important that Adherents promote more flexible and predictable funding modalities in order to sustain and build on progress made under this provision.

4. Promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries or territories by, where appropriate and feasible:

- a. increasing the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible, and predictable support including core and/or programme-based support, to enhance their financial independence, sustainability, and local ownership;*
- b. supporting civil society strategic alliances, networks, platforms and resource centres at regional, national, and sub-national levels, that can:*
- c. work to strengthen civil society actors, including their ability to develop local financial resource streams and to protect and promote civic space; and*
- d. represent civil society voices to international and regional institutions and fora, partner and provider country governments and other stakeholders; and*
- e. ensuring local civil society actors are involved in decision-making based on equal power relations with supported civil society strategic alliances, networks, platforms and resource centres, in the design, budgets, and implementation of their programming.*

138. Eleven Adherent Respondents have maintained measures already in place to promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries, while 2 have taken no measures. Seventeen Adherent Respondents introduced measures supporting civil society strategic alliances, networks and platforms, 16 introduced measures facilitating civil society actors' involvement in decision-making and 10 increased the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible and predictable support. A further ten Adherent Respondents reported having introduced other types of measures to promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8. Measures taken by Adherent Respondents to promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries or territories



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “Have you promoted and invested in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries in any of the following ways?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.
Source: Adherent questionnaire.

139. Adherent Respondents have taken or maintained diverse measures to support the leadership of civil society actors in partner countries or territories, with most of these initiatives being situated in Adherents’ LLD strategies and commitments. For example, Switzerland has embedded LLD as a core implementation approach within its International Cooperation Strategy 2025-2028 (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2025^[130]). To translate this approach into practice, SDC developed a Pathway for Action on Locally Led Cooperation, identifying priority areas such as local ownership, quality financing, capacity strengthening and equitable partnerships (ALNAP, n.d.^[131]). Norway commissioned a knowledge-mapping exercise to gain understanding on effective approaches to strengthening civil society in partner countries, focusing in particular on effective partnership models and on ways of supporting local ownership and leadership. The findings highlighted equitable partnerships, local leadership and locally grounded, long-term, flexible and trust-based support as key to strengthening civil society’s contribution to sustainable development and democratisation (Norad, 2026^[132]).

140. A number of Adherent Respondents have embedded co-operation with partner-country CSOs and other civil society actors as a structural requirement within their funding and programming rules, so as to increase local ownership throughout programme design, implementation and monitoring. Others have aimed to support partner-country CSOs more directly, often by means of supporting partner-country CSO platforms and networks, and with an emphasis on partner-country CSOs representing vulnerable and marginalised groups including women and youth. For example, Hungary Helps launched an

entrepreneurship training programme for Christian women in Pakistan, providing practical skills and community support to young women from minority communities facing exclusion, fostering their financial independence and long-term self-sufficiency (Hungary Helps, 2025^[133]).

141. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents have also aimed to support leadership of civil society in partner countries through increased core funding to CSOs, as well as initiatives explicitly targeting capacity strengthening and allocating support within the programme budget (see Pillar 3, provisions 3, 4 and 5). The United Kingdom has partnered with Comic Relief through the Shifting the Power – Strengthening African Civil Society programme, which supports capacity development of CSOs in Malawi, Zambia and Ghana, working across sectors such as early childhood development, gender justice, peace and security, safe and secure shelter, and mental health (FCDO, n.d.^[134]). The programme combines capacity strengthening with three complementary funding streams: the Catalyst Fund, which provides grants to grassroots organisations; the Civil Society Strengthening Fund, which offers a mix of core and restricted funding to enhance organisational capacity and resilience; and the Community Resourcing Match Fund, which delivers training on local income generation and matches locally raised funds to encourage diversification. It also seeks to strengthen the domestic understanding in the United Kingdom of how development assistance empowers local communities to advance their own priorities and rights. Similarly, Canada and Australia contribute to a Pooled Fund for Localisation that has supported both service delivery and capacity strengthening for local Bangladeshi CSOs responding to the Rohingya crisis, with the pooled fund, implemented via the Bangladeshi CSO BRAC, enabling greater flexibility and efficiency in adapting to evolving needs (Government of Canada, n.d.^[135]; BRAC, n.d.^[136]). New Zealand’s Partnering for Impact programme promotes localisation by requiring a minimum share of programme budgets to cover local partners’ operating and management costs (OECD, 2023^[109]). Finally, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) allocated 59% of its CSO support as programme and core funding in 2024, an approach that can strengthen locally led leadership and innovation (Sida, 2025^[137]).

142. Adherent Respondents have also made efforts to support civil society strategic alliances and platforms, taking distinct approaches depending on their objectives. Some have focused on strengthening the operational co-ordination and efficiency of civil society actors at the country or regional level, while others have focused on strengthening the representation of specific civil society constituencies within decision-making processes and fora.

143. Belgium’s Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs) illustrate the first approach, strengthening strategic alliances among CSOs by promoting co-ordination around shared geographic and thematic priorities, while preserving ownership through processes initiated and jointly developed by the CSOs themselves (Openaid Belgium, 2026^[138]). For the 2027-2031 period, Belgium approved 28 geographical JSFs – accounting for at least 90% of the budget for co-operation with CSOs of its Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation– alongside two thematic JSFs focusing on decent work and higher education and research (Openaid Belgium, 2026^[138]). Exemplifying the second approach, the EU has sought to enhance the leadership of local civil society actors through initiatives such as the EU Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships (INTPA Global YSB), which engages youth leaders from the EU and partner countries in decision making on external action (European Commission, n.d.^[139]). The inaugural cohort (2021-2023) contributed to the co-creation of the Youth Action Plan on EU External Action (2022-2027) (European Commission, n.d.^[140]), while subsequent cohorts have continued to provide recommendations and input on the EU’s international partnerships (INTPA Global YSB, n.d.^[141]). Additionally, the EU’s Women and Youth Democratic Engagement

(WYDE) programme aims to strengthen civil society actors by offering small grants, training and opportunities that empower young people and women to engage actively in political parties, parliaments and civic space (EU, 2026^[142]).

144. Beyond supporting alliances and platforms, a smaller number of Adherent Respondents have introduced mechanisms to monitor the quality of local leadership actually delivered in the programmes they support. New Zealand's Negotiated Partnerships mechanism, for instance, requires the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and its CSO partners to jointly assess annual programme performance against a set of localisation indicators, including sustained impact through local ownership, strengthened capacity of local partners, community feedback on the quality and relevance of activities, and locally conceived, owned and driven interventions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[143]). Ireland's ICSP scheme similarly requires partners to report against tailored localisation benchmarks. Partners are expected to consider power dynamics and shared decision making, risk management, capacity sharing, on-granting including flexible, predictable, multi-annual budgeting commitments, and promotion of the sustainability of national and local actors in their programming, among other aspects.

145. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents have highlighted progress in measures to promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors, including through mandatory local partnership requirements, increased core funding, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and support to CSO networks and platforms. However, only approximately a third of Adherent Respondents reported having increased the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible and predictable support to local CSOs, which remains a key enabler of genuine local leadership. Furthermore, few Adherents channel funding directly to partner-country CSOs, with most relying on international or provider-country CSOs as intermediaries. Intermediaries remain valuable in this regard, as they play a significant role in sharing risk, providing non-financial support and reducing the human-resource burden on Adherents, and offer a more appropriate choice of funding modality in specific contexts (OECD, 2023^[9]). However, direct funding remains most conducive to local ownership and leadership. Furthermore, local ownership and leadership depend not only on access to resources but also on the existence of an enabling civic space. Local actors face constraints in meaningfully leading development processes where freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly are restricted, or where CSOs face legal, financial or digital barriers to their actions. Progress on LLD and shifting power therefore requires sustained efforts to protect and promote civic space alongside expanding direct support to local actors.

5. Explore and share lessons on how to best support a broad range of formal and informal, traditional, and new types of civil society actors and actions at regional, national and sub-national levels in partner countries or territories, such as social movements, social economy actors, trade unions, and faith-based organisations.

146. Seventeen Adherent Respondents reported maintaining existing levels of effort in supporting a broad range of civil society actors, 7 have moderately increased efforts, 2 have significantly increased efforts, and 1 Adherent Respondent has decreased their efforts.

147. Adherent Respondents reported having adopted broad definitions of civil society in their strategies and policies to encompass a wide range of actors including community-based organisations (CBOs), social movements, academics, think tanks, co-operatives, trade unions, FBOs, diaspora organisations, employer organisations and informal networks. Based on this inclusive definition of civil society, Adherent Respondents have aimed to share lessons on how to best support groups in partner countries facing identity-based discrimination, including women, religious groups, migrant and diaspora communities. The Netherlands has used a broader definition of civil society under the Strengthening Civil Society 2021-2025 framework, including actors such as CBOs, social movements, trade

unions, FBOs, interest groups, diaspora organisations, cultural organisations and informal networks, in line with the definitions used under the DAC Recommendation (Government of the Netherlands, 2022^[144]). While funding eligibility depends on legal status, funded actions may target non-legal persons including informal movements, organisations and networks. Italy established the Italian Coordination of Diasporas for International Cooperation (CIDCI) in 2023 as a platform bringing together over one hundred associations across nine regional networks to promote the role and strengthen the capacity of diaspora communities in Italian development co-operation (CIDCI, n.d.^[145]). This initiative is in line with Italy's Law No. 125/2014, which promotes the participation of organisations and associations of communities of migrants in Italy's development co-operation activities (Government of Italy, 2014^[28]). Similarly, Hungary Helps Agency has also hosted domestic workshops with Hungarian CSOs to reflect on best practices for engaging with social movements, FBOs and CBOs.

148. Programme evaluations were also mentioned as opportunities for sharing lessons on how to better engage and support diverse civil society actors. Select Adherent Respondents cited feminist evaluations and multidimensional poverty and power analyses as particularly relevant to better supporting marginalised civil society actors. Adherent Respondents further highlighted a range of initiatives including the monitoring of CSO engagement in partner countries to evaluate progress on LLD, as well as the development of new guidelines and learning resources on how to work with different types of civil society actors. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents cited various initiatives to learn from CSOs on how to best support civil society actors through consultations, roundtables, forums and workshops, as well as through peer-learning spaces among providers, including the DAC CoP on Civil Society, and EU initiatives including TED and the Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation.

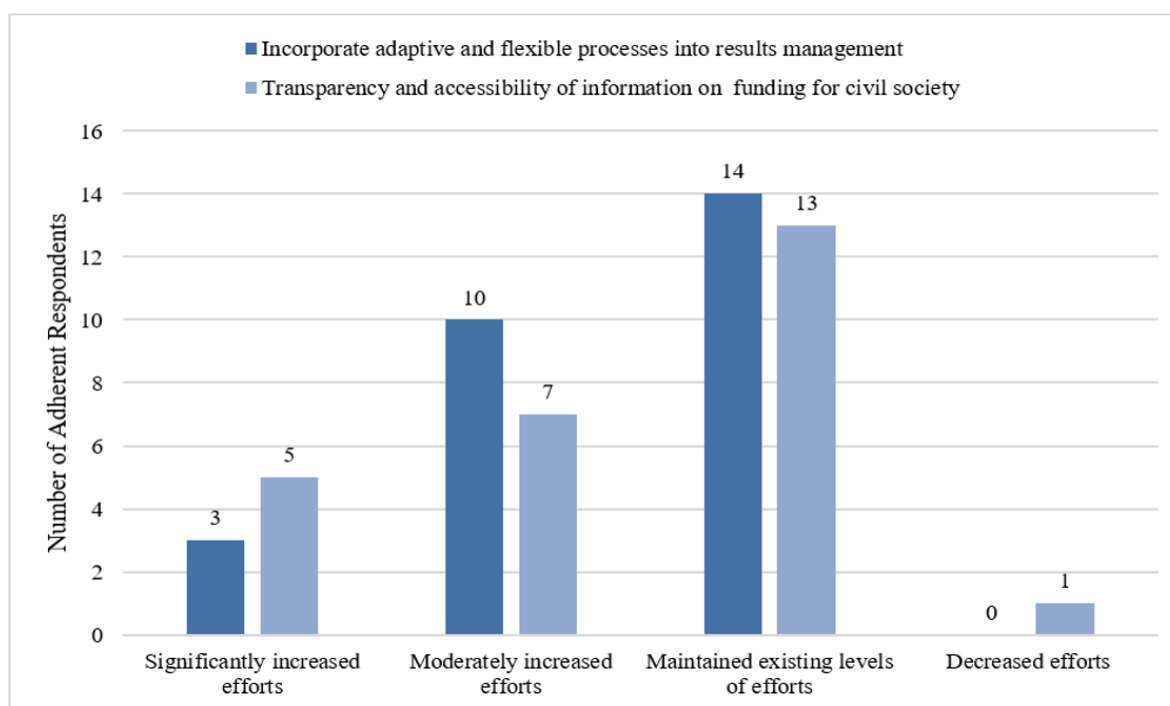
149. The United Kingdom, for example, has developed internal guidelines on working with civil society and published guidance principles on supporting HRDs, with the aim of providing staff with the direction needed to effectively engage diverse civil society actors (FCDO, 2025^[146]). Complementing this, the United Kingdom developed a dedicated "learning journey" on civil society, which brought together insights and practical lessons on the means and mechanisms for supporting different forms of civil society actors. Ireland's DFAT outlines mandatory protocols on working with certain types of civil society actors such as through its guidelines for Irish Embassies and Missions on HRDs. These protocols provide a framework to monitor risks, engage local civil society, and offer emergency diplomatic and practical assistance to defenders.

150. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents have demonstrated meaningful efforts to support a wide range of civil society actors, reflected in the adoption of broader definitions of civil society, evaluation approaches and guidelines focusing on support to specific types of civil society actors and knowledge-sharing initiatives both with civil society and among providers. However, Adherents would benefit from investing in more systematic approaches to documenting and sharing good practices, including through co-learning processes with civil society actors, to ensure emerging lessons more consistently inform providers' policies and approaches to supporting the full diversity of civil society actors.

6. Streamline administrative requirements for civil society support to lower transaction costs for civil society and providers, and incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of civil society funding.

151. Sixteen Adherent Respondents reported they had moderately increased efforts to streamline administrative requirements for civil society support, while 7 had maintained existing levels of effort, 4 had significantly increased their efforts, and 1 Adherent Respondent had decreased efforts (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9. Extent to which Adherent Respondents’ efforts to streamline administrative requirements for civil society support, and to incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of civil society funding, have changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the questions: “How have your efforts to streamline administrative requirements for civil society support changed?” and “How have your efforts to incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of civil society funding changed?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

152. Several Adherent Respondents have introduced standardised reporting formats aligned with international standards, including the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Grand Bargain 8+3 Template for humanitarian reporting, reducing duplication and improving predictability for civil society partners. Some have also invested in the digitalisation and centralisation of administrative systems, introducing online platforms for proposal submission, reporting and communications, and have engaged in consultations with CSO networks to identify and respond to administrative challenges. A number of Adherent Respondents have adopted simplified funding modalities, characterised by greater reliance on output-based reporting and more flexible rules on eligible contributions, including an increased proportion of co-financing covered through in-kind contributions.

153. Some Adherent Respondents have introduced multi-year framework agreements for accredited partner CSOs, providing greater predictability and reducing the administrative burden associated with repeated application cycles. A number have introduced simplified procedures specifically tailored to certain groups, such as WROs, or to certain contexts, including fragile and conflict-affected settings, recognising that standard administrative requirements can be disproportionately burdensome in these circumstances. Several Adherent Respondents also reported carrying out capacity-strengthening initiatives, including guidance materials and trainings for CSOs, public entities and auditors.

154. As part of GAC's GCTI (see Pillar 2, provision 2), Canada is developing a new grants and contribution management system, which will allow for more comprehensive monitoring across thematic and sectoral portfolios and alleviate the burden of reporting processes with an emphasis on results-based information (Government of Canada, n.d.^[115]). Through the GCTI FailSmart Lab, adapted planning and reporting tools are currently being tested with streamlined requirements tailored to specific actors, including WROs and small and medium-sized CSOs.

155. Fourteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of effort to incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into the results-based management (RBM) of civil society funding, while 10 have moderately increased efforts and 2 Adherent Respondents have significantly increased efforts (Figure 3.9).

156. Adherent Respondents reported efforts to simplify and streamline MEAL requirements and reporting processes to ensure greater flexibility for civil society actors, including by allowing varied reporting formats, reducing reporting frequency and decreasing the numbers of indicators to be tracked. Others have adopted specific approaches including RBM, third-party monitoring for learning, non-cost variations (allowing CSOs to adjust project plans without increasing the overall budget) and the co-development of MEAL strategies and requirements with civil society partners. Some Adherent Respondents specifically targeted such approaches to provide greater flexibility for humanitarian programmes to adapt to the capacity of CSOs in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Other Adherent Respondents have held discussions on the need for harmonising administrative requirements among providers, as a valuable approach to alleviating the administrative burden on CSOs, with the DAC CoP on Civil Society subgroup on harmonisation offering a valuable space for exchanging best practices and co-ordinating policies.

157. Italy, for example, adopted a RBM approach following an extensive participatory process with CSO networks, leading to the adoption of new General Procedures in 2020 (AICS, 2023^[147]). AICS subsequently developed an Operational Manual and delivered extensive RBM trainings for CSOs, public entities, auditors and other development actors (AICS, 2023^[148]). Similarly, Spain's Royal Decree 188/2025 introduced a modernised framework for development grants, allowing more flexible subsidy processes, advance payments, reduced guarantees and simplified administrative requirements (Government of Spain, 2025^[149]).

158. Sweden has also aligned its monitoring approach with partner systems. Sida does not impose a standard result format, allowing partners to use methods suited to their context, provided their objectives remain measurable (Sida, n.d.^[150]). This approach applies to both project and programme funding, strengthening local ownership through tailored country-level results frameworks.

159. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents outlined several initiatives which have aimed to lower transaction costs and administrative barriers for civil society. However, they acknowledged that small and partner-country CSOs continue to face disproportionate administrative, financial and reporting burdens, which are further compounded by limited organisational capacity and, in many cases, fragile or restrictive operating environments. These barriers constrain the meaningful engagement of DAC members with partner-country CSOs and undermine efforts and commitments towards LLD. The lowering of administrative barriers and transaction costs is linked to a wider shift from risk transfer to risk sharing between Adherents and civil society, which can be achieved through more proportionate compliance requirements, harmonising reporting across providers, allowing flexibility in budgets, and providing core funding to strengthen the capacity of CSOs. Where risk is not adequately shared, providers default to larger intermediaries, leaving

smaller and partner-country CSOs to carry political and operational risk without the resources or decision-making power to manage it, directly undermining local ownership.

7. Enhance transparency and accessibility of information in partner countries or territories on provider funding for civil society, balancing transparency with potential security and political risks for funded civil society actors in sensitive environments.

160. Thirteen Adherent Respondents reported having maintained existing levels of transparency and accessibility of information on their funding for civil society in partner countries, while 7 had moderately increased, 5 had significantly increased and 1 Adherent Respondent had decreased transparency and accessibility of information. In order to enhance transparency of information, most Adherent Respondents have focused on using a variety of channels, including official websites and social media platforms for communicating funding opportunities, notices and guidelines. Others have focused on developing online data portals regarding ODA flows and results, as well as centralised systems acting as a repository for funding opportunities and supported projects. In addition, Adherent Respondents referred to their alignment with international standards for transparency, such as IATI, as well as their consistent reporting to the OECD, including to the DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) which ensures publicly accessible data on ODA flows across DAC members, including specific data on flows for CSOs.

161. In order to enhance transparency of information, some Adherents have developed online platforms that publish data regarding ODA investments and results. These include, for example, the DevData portal of New Zealand's MFAT, the AusDevPortal of Australia's DFAT and the Openaid portal of the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). Greece is developing a digital registry for CSOs, businesses and other beneficiaries of international development co-operation funding, established under Law No. 4781/2021 and Presidential Decree No. 4/2023 (Government of Greece, 2023^[29]). The platform will be interoperable with a parallel digital registry of CSOs managed by the Ministry of Interior, increasing transparency in the monitoring of development co-operation partnerships and associated funding flows.

162. A number of Adherent Respondents recognised the need to balance transparency with the need to mitigate security risks, since in restrictive and fragile contexts, disclosure could endanger civil society actors or compromise operations. Therefore, some Adherent Respondents reported having adopted flexible approaches to transparency for projects in high-risk contexts, such as by withholding publication of information for a defined period or by limiting the level of detail shared publicly.

163. Adherent Respondents have also organised information sessions on funding frameworks, both at the provider and partner-country level, as well as engagement opportunities that focus on receiving feedback from civil society on funding modalities and guidelines. Furthermore, in order to improve accessibility, several Adherent Respondents recognised that further efforts should be made to accept and provide documentation in local languages as a way to further simplify administrative processes and reduce barriers for partner-country CSOs.

164. For example, Denmark has conducted local partner dialogues in partner countries as a direct engagement mechanism. Through these dialogues, Denmark gathers feedback from local partners on partnership co-operation, support modalities and guidelines, while also proactively informing partners about existing framework conditions, funding opportunities and increasing local leadership. Similarly, Italy has taken a proactive approach to enhancing transparency and accessibility of funding information for civil society partners across different country contexts. For instance, in Tunisia, Italy conducts

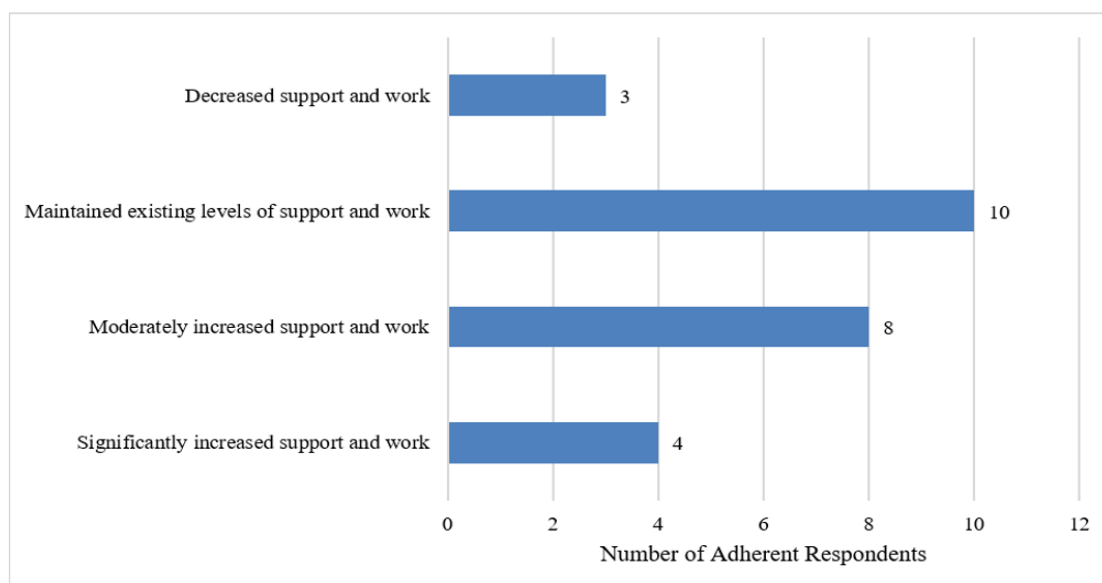
training sessions open to all CSOs on applicable competitive procedures to clarify the requirements of calls for proposals and provide an opportunity to gather CSOs' inputs on sectoral priorities and local needs. In Ukraine, Italy has leveraged sectoral UN Clusters where CSOs play an active role in raising awareness among Italian, partner-country and international CSOs about available funding opportunities, with dedicated information sessions organised for each call for proposals to reach a wide range of partner-country CSOs.

165. In conclusion, Adherents have taken steps to enhance transparency of information on their ODA funding overall and on their funding for CSOs specifically, including through international or Adherent online platforms. What is not clear, however, is the degree to which information on Adherent flows for CSOs is disaggregated by partner country, and easily accessible to partner-country-level stakeholders.

8. Support and work with civil society actors to advance global citizenship education for inclusive sustainable development and facilitate people's and civil society's engagement to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

166. Ten Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of support to and work with civil society actors to advance GCE, while 8 have moderately increased, 4 have significantly increased and 3 Adherent Respondents have decreased such support and work (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10. Extent to which Adherent Respondents' support and work with civil society actors to advance global citizenship education has changed since 2021



Note: 24 Adherent Respondents to the question "How have your support and work with civil society actors to advance global citizenship education changed?". As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

167. Several Adherent Respondents have either developed strategies on GCE or have integrated GCE considerations within wider development policies or legislative frameworks. These are often elaborated through consultation with public institutions, CSOs, academia and other relevant stakeholders, with several Adherent Respondents also establishing multistakeholder working groups on GCE to support implementation. In GCE

programmes, Adherent Respondents have developed courses, conferences and awareness-raising campaigns designed to foster inclusive engagement and understanding of the 2030 Agenda, with most initiatives taking place at the provider-country level, though some are also targeted at partner countries.

168. For example, the Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025 promotes close collaboration with CSOs across formal and informal education, targeting both youth and adults (Government of Ireland, n.d.^[151]). Initiatives such as the Our World Irish Aid Awards support GCE among primary school students. Furthermore, Portugal has shown sustained commitment to GCE, with a dedicated funding line managed by Camões, marking its 20th anniversary in 2025. Its National Strategy for Development Education 2025-2030, co-developed with CSOs, positions development education as a tool for addressing discrimination, misinformation and structural inequalities (Camões, n.d.^[152]). Portugal also supports the Global Citizenship Programme for Sustainable Development (CGpDS), launched at the 2021 Ibero-American Summit. Through national multistakeholder working groups, CSOs participate alongside public authorities in shaping, implementing and evaluating policies, strengthening their role as agents of change. The programme also promotes regional dialogue on key issues, including the protection of democratic principles and civic space (CGpDS, n.d.^[153]).

169. Luxembourg began a major reform of its GCE sector in 2024 to align CSO activities under a unified, impact-driven vision, promoting collaboration and measurable outcomes. During this period, GCE initiatives are fully funded to support innovation and co-creation. Meanwhile, Austria's GCE efforts include a private sector funding programme that raises awareness of the SDGs among businesses and fosters partnerships with development co-operation actors (Austrian Development Agency, n.d.^[154]).

170. The funding allocation to GCE initiatives across Adherents varies, with several Adherent Respondents reporting that they are currently prioritising multi-year programming on GCE to shift towards a more strategic approach, while others have reported that GCE programming has been de-prioritised at a strategic level and that it has been subject to significant budget cuts.

171. In conclusion, support for GCE among Adherent Respondents has become increasingly divergent since 2021. A number of Adherent Respondents have moved towards more strategic, sustained investment in GCE – through multi-year programming, dedicated funding lines, or structural reform of the sector – while others have reduced funding and strategic attention to GCE, primarily as a result of domestic budget cuts and shifting government priorities. Where GCE efforts continue, these remain primarily focused on raising awareness within provider countries, with comparatively few initiatives extending to partner countries. Sustained and increased funding for GCE can play an important role in establishing a common narrative on the strategic value of civil society and civic space for sustainable development. Such a narrative can help counter mis- and disinformation campaigns targeting civil society and restore declining trust in CSOs across both partner and provider countries.

9. Work with civil society actors to respect DAC and other international standards related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and to ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance.

172. Eleven Adherent Respondents have maintained existing efforts to work with civil society actors in order to respect DAC and international standards related to the HDP Nexus and to ending SEAH, while 3 reported that no work has been done. Among Adherent Respondents, 14 have worked with civil society actors to follow and implement DAC and

other international standards related to ending SEAH, while 12 Adherent Respondents have done so in relation to the HDP Nexus.

173. Several Adherent Respondents have established policies and strategies addressing SEAH prevention and/or on the HDP Nexus, supported by guidance notes to assist implementation, in line with the relevant DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus [[OECD/LEGAL/5019](#)] (hereafter, “DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus”) and on the DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: Key Pillars of Prevention and Response [DCD/DAC(2023)42] (hereafter, “DAC Recommendation on Ending SEAH”) (OECD, 2019^[44]; OECD, 2019^[155]). These approaches were often supported by the establishment of government units and teams focusing on the prevention of SEAH or on the HDP Nexus, as well as multistakeholder working groups including civil society actors, with a strong emphasis on the participation of CSO networks. Adherent Respondents also highlighted participation in networks related to this work, including the DAC Reference Group on Ending SEAH, the Practitioners’ Network for European Development Co-operation, the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) and the Working Party on Development Co-operation and International Partnerships (CODEV-PI).

174. Adherent Respondents have utilised policies, integrity charters and codes of conduct to establish standards specific to SEAH prevention, which are also integrated as foundations in Adherents’ strategic frameworks and as requirements and clauses within funding agreements. Measures regarding the prevention of SEAH include requiring compliance with SEAH standards in funding agreements as well as annual self-evaluations to demonstrate compliance with such standards. For example, Austria adopted a policy on the prevention of SEAH in 2022, which is reflected in grant contracts with CSOs. In addition, the Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy 2025-2027 identifies the HDP Nexus as a key strategic approach, underlining the importance of co-ordinating and complementing HDP measures in fragile or conflict-affected countries and regions (Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs of Austria, n.d.^[156]). Furthermore, EU development co-operation contracts require mandatory self-evaluations on the prevention of SEAH, while its Humanitarian Partnership Certificate obliges CSOs to commit to zero tolerance of SEAH before applying for EU funding, and to submit annual implementation reports. The EU Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) developed a Guidance Note on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH), which further clarifies expectations in line with the DAC Recommendation on Ending SEAH, with the EU actively participating in the OECD DAC Reference Group on Ending SEAH (European Commission, n.d.^[157]).

175. Furthermore, some Adherent Respondents have invested in building provider and partner-country CSOs’ capacity to align with SEAH standards, through training and prevention programmes. GAC partnered with Co-operation Canada to establish Digna, the Canadian Centre of Expertise on prevention of SEAH (Digna, n.d.^[158]). Since 2019, Digna has contributed to the training, resource development and capacity strengthening for Canadian CSOs working in development co-operation. By 2023, Digna had supported over 100 Canadian CSOs working internationally, with over 75% of these creating or updating policies and procedures to prevent SEAH, and 87% reporting improved knowledge (Government of Canada, n.d.^[159]). Similarly, Italy supports capacity strengthening of partner-country CSOs on SEAH and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. AICS emergency programmes in Ukraine include training and capacity strengthening on SEAH and GBV prevention, while in Mozambique, local civil society partner *Grupo de Mulheres de Partilha de Ideias di Sofala* (GMPIS) implements community-based awareness raising

promoting women's rights and legal protection. Lithuania also funds SEAH-related projects, including in Kenya, where it supports the development of an integrated digital platform for GBV and disability reporting in Nakuru County, with potential for replication in other regions of Kenya.

176. On the HDP Nexus, Adherent Respondents reported various initiatives founded on collaboration with provider and partner-country CSOs, in some cases with specific emphasis on WROs, context-specific initiatives that link humanitarian relief with long-term development and peacebuilding outcomes, tools such as conflict-sensitive trainings, context analyses to support strategy development and crisis modifiers for enabling the rapid deployment of funding in crisis contexts. Furthermore, some Adherent Respondents have introduced sections in their application forms which require proposals to reflect their alignment with the HDP Nexus. For example, the EU has integrated the HDP Nexus into its programming, supported by conclusions of the Council of the EU (Council of the European Union, 2018^[160]) and implementation by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in relevant contexts. DG ECHO includes a resilience marker in its proposal process to assess alignment with the Nexus. In Ethiopia, for example, a Team Europe collaboration framework has been developed to improve co-ordination, reduce duplication and better align financial flows, with CSOs consulted and involved throughout.

177. Belgium has established a dedicated Nexus and Fragility unit, working closely with CSOs to strengthen alignment with the DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus through training, joint reflection and integration into strategies and programmes, enhancing coherence across its interventions. On SEAH, the 2018 Integrity Charter for Belgian NGOs represents a sector-wide commitment signed by all Belgian CSOs active in development co-operation, and sets minimum sector-wide standards, including on the prevention of SEAH (NGO federatie, n.d.^[161]).

178. Hungary, through the Hungary Helps Programs (HHP) Act, has unified its HDP efforts under a single framework, focusing on long-term stability and conflict prevention (Hungary Helps, 2023^[162]). The framework also recognises FBOs as key partners in addressing the root causes of conflict, including through promoting religious tolerance.

179. Adherent Respondents also highlighted strong engagement in multistakeholder working groups involving civil society, a finding which is consistent with the 2024 *Report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus*, which found that nearly half of respondents considered HDP Nexus approaches to have enabled closer collaboration with civil society [DCD/DAC/INCAF(2023)1/FINAL] (OECD, 2019^[163]).

180. In conclusion, a majority of Adherent Respondents have maintained efforts to work with civil society actors to respect DAC and international standards on the HDP Nexus and on ending SEAH. The institutionalisation of these standards through policies, codes of conduct, funding agreement requirements and dedicated organisational units represents meaningful progress, and the strong engagement of civil society actors, including CSO networks, in multistakeholder working groups reflects efforts to ensure participatory approaches to such areas of work. Nevertheless, while compliance-based approaches are valuable, several Adherent Respondents acknowledged the need for sustained investment in capacity strengthening to support CSOs in internalising these standards. Furthermore, while engagement on the HDP Nexus has progressed, contextual complexity in fragile and conflict-affected settings continues to present significant operational challenges.

10. Pursue internal co-ordination and dialogue across their government, as well as consultation with related institutions as appropriate, with a view to:

- a. *advancing respect for international humanitarian law and the principle of non-discrimination; and*
- b. *addressing obstacles to supporting civil society, working with persons in the most vulnerable and marginalised positions that may arise from unintended consequences due to misinterpretation or misapplication of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing standards.*

181. Fourteen Adherent Respondents reported having maintained existing levels of effort to advance respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and the principle of non-discrimination, while only 1 reported that no efforts have been made. Among those who have maintained prior efforts, 14 Adherent Respondents reported having consulted with related institutions, 11 having conducted dialogue, 9 having pursued internal co-ordination across their government and 7 having made other efforts.

182. Several Adherent Respondents reported having endorsed international commitments such as the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel and the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) Global Initiative to Galvanise Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, as well as joining networks such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative. Adherent Respondents also highlighted being Party to international treaties such as the Geneva Conventions, as well as engaging in international/regional fora such as the UN General Assembly High-Level Week, the European Humanitarian Forum and the Pacific Roundtable on International Humanitarian Law. For example, Estonia and the United Kingdom co-chaired the Good Humanitarian Donorship Network from 2023 to 2025, where discussions focused on providers' roles in upholding IHL. Adherent Respondents also reported initiatives to strengthen domestic implementation of IHL, including the establishment of specific national committees, and engagement across ministries and government agencies. New Zealand published its first *Voluntary Report on Domestic Implementation of IHL* in 2024, providing a clear overview of national measures and promoting domestic dialogue on IHL (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[164]). The Slovak Republic, meanwhile, has maintained a permanent inter-ministerial Committee on IHL since 2001 to support implementation and dissemination at the national level. Public statements calling for the respect of IHL in specific humanitarian contexts, along with engagement with UN agencies and humanitarian organisations and advocacy on key thematic issues, including the protection of women, children and humanitarian workers in conflict, were also used to advance the principle of non-discrimination.

183. Twelve Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of effort in addressing obstacles to supporting civil society that may arise from unintended consequences due to misinterpretation or misapplication of AML and CTF standards, while 3 have made no efforts. Among Adherent Respondents who have endeavoured to address such obstacles to civil society support, 8 reported having consulted with related institutions, 8 had conducted dialogue and 6 had pursued internal co-ordination across their government, while 5 Adherent Respondents reported having made other efforts.

184. Adherent Respondents' initiatives to mitigate the impact of AML and CFT standards on civil society operations have primarily focused on improving co-ordination with domestic stakeholders including line ministries, national banks, oversight authorities and civil society through multistakeholder platforms, roundtables and ad-hoc engagement. Such co-ordination and engagement aimed to find a balance between risk management and the operational realities of humanitarian and development work in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Several Adherent Respondents reported initiatives to support civil society through capacity strengthening and clearer guidance. These include issuing government guidelines, providing financial management training and reviewing reporting

requirements to ensure they remain proportionate and feasible. Finally, several Adherent Respondents referred to the amendment of domestic legislation and adapted policies to introduce greater flexibility in the application of these standards for CSOs operating in humanitarian settings.

185. The United Kingdom's Tri-Sector Group, chaired by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Home Office, brings together government departments, international CSOs and financial institutions to reduce barriers to humanitarian, peacebuilding and development work while ensuring compliance with counter-terrorism legislation and sanctions frameworks (Government of the United Kingdom, 2025^[165]).

186. In Norway, concerns from CSOs about unintended effects of AML/CFT regulations led Norad to convene a multistakeholder dialogue with relevant ministries, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Financial Supervisory Authority and CSOs (OECD, 2025^[111]). This resulted in a joint roundtable, co-facilitated with the CSO umbrella organisation, Forum, to address this issue as it relates to CSOs and develop co-ordinated policy input to FATF.

187. Similarly, the Dutch Roundtable on Financial Access for Non-Profit Organisations, co-convened since 2017, brings together CSOs, government and financial institutions to discuss financial inclusion and challenges related to AML/CTF. An online portal developed by ABN AMRO bank partners supports CSOs by clarifying due diligence requirements and facilitating access to banking services.

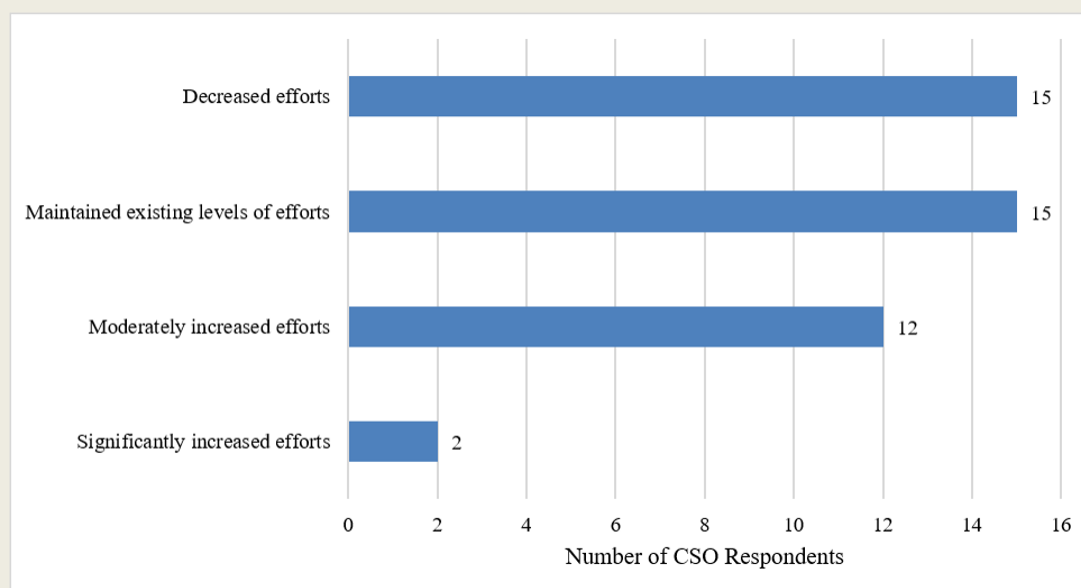
188. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents have broadly maintained existing levels of effort on both dimensions of this provision. On advancing respect for IHL and the principle of non-discrimination, engagement has been sustained through a combination of endorsement of international commitments, participation in multilateral fora and public advocacy. On addressing obstacles to civil society arising from the misinterpretation or misapplication of AML and CTF standards, a number of Adherents have made progress through multistakeholder dialogue, legislative reform and targeted guidance to civil society. However, a minority of Adherent Respondents reported no efforts in this area, and further progress is needed, in particular in strengthening domestic co-ordination among relevant ministries, oversight authorities and financial institutions, and in investing in practical solutions that reduce the operational constraints that AML and CTF standards can impose on CSOs.

Box 3.2. CSOs' perspectives on Adherents' efforts to implement Pillar 2

Across consultations and CSO questionnaire responses, CSOs recognised progress in the implementation of Pillar 2 of the DAC Recommendation among Adherents, particularly through an increase in engagement opportunities with civil society since its adoption. However, CSOs also highlighted persistent shortcomings in DAC members' support for and engagement with partner-country CSOs.

In the CSO questionnaire, CSOs demonstrated mixed views on DAC members' efforts to implement Pillar 2. Among CSO Respondents, 15 reported that DAC members' efforts to support and engage with civil society have been maintained since 2021, another 15 reported they had decreased, 12 reported that they had moderately increased, and 2 CSO Respondents reported that they had significantly increased (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11. CSO Respondents on the extent to which DAC members' efforts to support and engage with civil society have changed since 2021



Note: 37 CSO Respondents to the question: “To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to support and engage with civil society since 2021?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: CSO questionnaire.

First, across consultations and in the questionnaires, CSOs acknowledged that Adherents have increased CSOs' opportunities through, for example, working groups, dialogues and consultations, which often focus on specific policies or strategies at the design and/or evaluation stages. Likewise, CSO Respondents acknowledged increased support for CSO participation in national, regional and international dialogues and conferences by some Adherents.

While engagement opportunities have increased since 2021, CSOs argued that these remain largely accessible to provider-country and international CSOs, while partner-country and grassroots CSOs face significant barriers to engagement. These include limited financial and human resources, travel constraints, inadequate sharing of information ahead of consultations, poor internet connectivity and lack of language interpretation, all of which restrict access, meaningful participation and inclusion. Furthermore, the consistency and inclusivity of such dialogue and engagement opportunities was noted to depend on the willingness of leadership and continuity of individual staff at headquarters, embassies and offices in partner countries.

Moreover, CSO Respondents stressed that dialogue and engagement opportunities tend to be ad hoc and insufficiently institutionalised. They further highlighted that, even where consultations take place, these typically act more as a space for knowledge sharing and “box ticking” than meaningful engagement. CSOs argued that feedback loops are frequently weak or absent, with inputs often not systematically acknowledged or reflected in final decisions, leading to frustration and potential disengagement from future engagement opportunities by civil society actors. In light of these challenges, across consultations and in questionnaire responses, CSOs stressed the need to go beyond ad hoc consultations and dialogue, towards processes that entail joint decision

making and co-creation of policies and strategies. CSOs also underlined the importance of reinforcing embassy-level engagement with civil society, including through the designation of focal points, and of ensuring that consultation and dialogue mechanisms are inclusive and accessible by providing support for participation costs, such as travel and preparation, for smaller and partner-country CSOs.

Second, CSO Respondents recognised the valuable support provided by some DAC members in financing GCE initiatives, with particular emphasis on school-based and youth-targeted educational programmes, though some initiatives have also focused on the informal education of adults through community-based projects. However, CSO Respondents also recognised that GCE has been particularly affected by cuts in ODA and polarisation in provider countries, with several initiatives being interrupted due to a lack of political prioritisation or insufficient funding.

Across CSO questionnaire responses and in consultations, CSOs recognised that Adherents continue to provide valuable funding to national and regional CSO platforms, coalitions and networks both in partner and provider countries. However, CSOs also called for increased recognition and funding of civil society ecosystem infrastructure, including national CSO platforms, regional coalitions, resource centres, legal support organisations, digital security providers and rapid response networks. According to CSOs, these actors play a critical role in co-ordination, evidence generation, advocacy, peer learning, protection and early warning, yet are often underfunded compared to project-delivery mechanisms.

Third, a key issue recognised by CSOs is that DAC members' financing tends to be project-based and short-term, with limited core and programme funding for CSOs as development actors in their own right. This contributes to a lack of predictability and coverage for overheads and administrative costs, a particularly acute issue for smaller and partner-country CSOs which are most in need of this form of funding to sustain and strengthen their capacity. Some CSOs also recognised that, amidst shrinking ODA budgets and reduced funding for civil society, the availability of long-term flexible core funding is likely to diminish, a trend which may have severe implications for the availability and accessibility of funding for partner-country CSOs, and thus also the progress towards LLD. CSOs also noted the risk that funding cuts may reduce Adherents' risk tolerance, as well as result in an increase in earmarked funding aligned with providers' interests rather than locally defined priorities.

In response to ongoing ODA cuts, initiatives have emerged to help CSOs adapt. The Civic Strength Partners (CSP), for example, is a civil society-led response to the organisational crisis triggered by decreasing ODA flows, led by Accountability Lab, Development Gateway and Digital Public (Civic Strength Partners, n.d.^[166]). CSP currently provides transition support that helps CSOs preserve the value they have created over time, supporting strategic planning around organisational transitions, mergers and partnerships, and asset protection.

In addition, CSO Respondents raised concerns regarding the extent to which Adherents are genuinely progressing on local ownership and LLD. While CSOs recognised efforts by some Adherents to shift funding and decision making towards local actors, the majority of Adherents' financing continues to rely heavily on international and provider-country intermediaries, with only a limited and insufficient share ODA reaching partner-country CSOs directly. CSOs called for clear, time-bound commitments to increase the share of direct, flexible, multi-year core funding reaching partner-country CSOs, alongside structural changes to how funding passes through intermediaries, so that more decision-making power and resources are channelled to the civil society actors closest

to the communities concerned. One consulted CSO also recommended that Adherents prioritise partner-country CSOs as the primary recipients of ODA for civil society, while also improving accountability by establishing funding targets for partner-country CSOs and ensuring greater transparency throughout the sub-granting chain.

CSOs also cautioned against narrow or purely quantitative approaches to measuring LLD, warning that simple funding-share indicators risk being “gamed” by partnering with the largest, most compliance-ready partner-country CSO, rather than the broader and more diverse range of local and national civil society actors that genuinely localised support is meant to reach. Such indicators risk distorting the understanding of meaningful localisation and undermine the diversity and resilience of local civil society ecosystems. CSOs identified an opportunity to recognise a broader ecosystem of local actors within LLD, noting the important contributions of CBOs, co-operatives, producer organisations, local networks, and, where appropriate, local private sector actors such as micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). These actors are often essential to mobilising local knowledge, relationships and investment, and contribute to systems change both quantitatively and qualitatively in ways that are not always reflected in existing localisation metrics. CSO Respondents suggested that engaging this broader ecosystem could strengthen future approaches to mapping and measuring systemic transformation. For example, one CSO suggested collaborating with partner-country governments and civil society to develop national localisation frameworks to give a stronger role to local actors in defining localisation standards and to codify these into the rules and regulations that providers and international/provider-country CSOs must abide by to engage in those partner countries.

Some CSOs themselves have taken measures to advance localisation, including through the development of institutional policies and co-ordinated calls for action. For example, Malteser International’s localisation policy commits the organisation to ensuring that humanitarian and development interventions are led by local actors, rooted in local knowledge and based on local priorities and capacities, rather than being driven primarily by international organisations, framing localisation as “putting local actors in the driver’s seat with appropriate resources, authority, and recognition” (Malteser International, 2026^[167]). Similarly, the United Kingdom-based international CSO, Peace Direct, co-ordinated the Call to Action on Locally Led Development (Peace Direct, 2026^[168]), a statement endorsed by governments, civil society actors and private philanthropic organisations, grounded in the OECD’s *Practical Guidelines for Supporting Locally Led Development* (OECD, 2026^[117]) and developed through an inclusive process involving some Adherents alongside international, provider and partner-country CSOs. Meanwhile, Roots of Development has developed a *Framework for Funders* aimed at guiding providers on how to identify which local civil society actors to support based on their intention and capacity to strengthen social cohesion, community ownership and trust: the foundations for long-term transformational impact (Roots of Development, 2026^[169]).

Finally, CSOs also stressed that the “do no harm” principle should apply not only to programme design and delivery, but also to funding restrictions, provider exits and portfolio shifts. Given the significant consequences that sudden funding changes can have on civil society actors’ capacity to protect and promote civic space, CSOs called for early communication and consultation with affected organisations before such decisions take effect. Concrete measures to mitigate harm in this context include assessing the impact of funding changes on at-risk organisations and co-ordination infrastructure, introducing flexible contract adaptations, and establishing bridge or transition arrangements where possible. CSOs also underlined the importance of co-

ordination among providers to avoid simultaneous funding withdrawals that create sudden and unmanageable funding cliffs for civil society actors.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

Overarching implementation challenges for Pillar 2

189. Adherents face a set of interconnected challenges in implementing Pillar 2 of the DAC Recommendation on support for and engagement with civil society, summarised as follows:

- reduction of both the quantity and quality of funding available to civil society due to cuts to ODA, undermining progress on funding modalities and LLD;
- limited ability to effectively support and engage CSOs in restrictive contexts, further weakening CSOs' operational capacities;
- insufficient capacity – particularly among smaller and partner-country CSOs – to meet providers' often burdensome financial and administrative requirements, increasing reliance on provider-country CSOs;
- slow progress in harmonising due diligence requirements, complicating compliance and undermining effective collaboration with partner-country CSOs; and
- untapped potential of pooled and collective funding mechanisms, alongside limited engagement with the private sector.

190. This section outlines these challenges in greater detail.

191. First, across Adherent and CSO questionnaire responses and throughout consultations, Adherents and CSOs acknowledged that a central challenge in the implementation of Pillar 2 is the ongoing cuts to ODA, amounting to a decline of 8.5% in 2024, 23.3% in 2025, and a projected decline of 6.9% in 2026, as previously noted (OECD, 2026^[72]).

192. Adherent Respondents underscored that these cuts have reduced the overall resources available for civil society support, and have also impacted modalities of support, as they have constrained DAC members' ability or willingness to provide multi-year and predictable funding, which is essential for CSOs to sustain operations and engagement efforts. CSOs also stressed the impact of funding cuts on their ability to engage consistently with relevant stakeholders, a trend evidenced in a 2025 survey by Pact, which found that 72% of surveyed partner-country CSOs experiencing funding declines also reported a decrease in their engagement with leaders and policymakers in their own countries (Pact, 2025^[79]). In light of the significant consequences that funding cuts have had on CSOs' capacity, several CSO Respondents called on providers to give greater consideration to the "do no harm" principle when making decisions on funding shifts, restrictions and exits. According to CSOs, this could include practices such as consulting and providing advance notice to civil society, conducting risk assessments, and ensuring transition arrangements and donor co-ordination to avoid simultaneous funding withdrawals.

193. Adherents and CSO Respondents recognised the need to provide more direct support to CSOs, as only 1% of total bilateral ODA was allocated *to* CSOs, compared with 12% channelled *through* them in 2024 [DCD(2026)4]. Of the total ODA for CSOs, direct funding has also decreased over time, from 12% *to* CSOs in 2021 to 10% in 2024, whereas funding *through* CSOs went from 88% in 2021 to 90% in 2024 [DCD(2026)4].

194. Throughout consultations, Adherents and CSOs also recognised that current modalities of support, which tend to be short-term, project-based and often with provider-defined results frameworks, are not aligned with the flexibility needed to effectively shift power and more directly support partner-country CSOs. Results from the GPEDC *Making Development Co-operation More Effective Progress Report 2026* highlight this, with CSOs indicating that access to provider funding remains restricted or limited and often focused on implementing providers' own priorities (OECD/UNDP, 2026^[14]). In order to deliver on LLD, Adherent and CSO Respondents acknowledged the need to increase the availability of direct, flexible, multi-year core support for partner-country CSOs. Amidst growing pressure on resources, there is a risk that Adherents will default to partnering with international and provider-country CSOs, which may have greater capacity to sustain operations despite budget cuts, rather than more directly funding smaller and partner-country CSOs. However, some Adherents have made efforts to partner more directly with local organisations despite an overall reduction in available funding, reflecting a recognition that, in a context of limited resources, this can also contribute to greater efficiency by reducing the number of intermediary actors involved.

195. Furthermore, Adherents and CSO Respondents recognised that national and regional CSO platforms, coalitions and networks have continued to play a valuable role by enabling smaller and partner-country CSOs to gain greater leverage through co-ordination, collective advocacy and dialogue with authorities. According to results from the GPEDC *Making Development Co-operation More Effective Progress Report 2026*, partner-country governments positively assess the role of CSO-initiated co-ordination mechanisms, including platforms, networks and associations, in facilitating CSOs' engagement in policy dialogue and co-ordinating CSOs at national or sectoral level (OECD/UNDP, 2026^[14]). However, GPEDC monitoring data also highlights that providers are more critical, highlighting gaps in the strength and long-term sustainability of CSO-initiated co-ordination mechanisms (OECD/UNDP, 2026^[14]).

196. Additionally, while the impact of ongoing ODA cuts on the distribution of funding between provider-country, international and partner-country CSOs is still uncertain, there is concern that budget constraints may reverse progress made in LLD since the adoption of the DAC Recommendation. Between 2020 and 2024, ODA to and through provider-country CSOs decreased from 65% to 63%, for international CSOs it decreased from 28% to 26%, while for partner-country CSOs it increased from 7% to 10% [DCD(2026)4]. While the slight increase in the share of ODA allocated directly to partner-country CSOs may signal some improvement in DAC members' efforts to deliver on local ownership, provider-country CSOs continue to be prioritised as primary grantees and implementing partners. At the same time, in light of the declining funding of international CSOs – with a 6% decline in ODA to and through international CSOs between 2020 and 2024 [DCD(2026)4] – some CSOs expressed concerns during consultations that continued reductions in funding may undermine the essential role of international CSOs as drivers of advocacy, research and programming, and their scope for risk-taking.

197. Second, across the Adherent and CSO questionnaires and consultations, Adherents and CSOs Respondents recognised that funding cuts and regulatory restrictions have contributed to a deteriorating enabling environment for CSOs. According to FRA, 39% of surveyed EU CSOs cited politically motivated funding cuts and withdrawals as frequent restraints on their organisations (FRA, 2026^[82]). Moreover, in several partner countries, regulations restricting civil society's access to funding have complicated and limited providers' ability to support CSOs. For example, and as noted, foreign-agent laws have been introduced across some partner countries, with the aim of restricting CSOs' operational capacity by imposing demanding reporting requirements, frequent audits and stigmatising labels on CSOs receiving funding from abroad, with non-compliance

sometimes resulting in heavy fines, forced closures or even imprisonment (Robinson, 2025^[170]). Such restrictive regulations place high security risks on partner-country CSOs, incentivise self-censorship among civil society actors, and represent a key challenge in DAC members' ability to support and engage with partner-country CSOs (CIVICUS, 2025^[171]).

198. Across questionnaire responses, Adherent Respondents identified several other obstacles affecting their ability to effectively support and engage CSOs in restrictive contexts, particularly those in partner countries. For example, some Adherent Respondents reported having avoided launching public calls for proposals in order to prevent harm and backlash against CSO applicants. Adherent Respondents also recognised that in certain restrictive contexts, some CSOs may transition towards more informal structures to avoid security threats and administrative obstacles. However, engaging with informal civil society actors is a challenge for some providers who may be legally required to exclusively enter into agreements with registered organisations. CSO Respondents also highlighted that organisations representing vulnerable or marginalised communities tend to be disproportionately targeted by regulations in partner countries such as mandatory memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and CSO registries. Among the several challenges that these groups face, the inability to formally register as a CSO is a significant obstacle to their operational legitimacy and their access to provider funding.

199. Third, Adherents and CSOs Respondents alike recognised that a key challenge to implementation is that smaller and partner-country CSOs often have limited capacity to meet providers' financial and administrative requirements. As acknowledged by Adherent Respondents, this is in part driven by a risk-averse institutional culture among providers, which has contributed to burdensome reporting criteria and a lack of flexibility in compliance. Such risk aversion has encouraged reliance on established provider-country CSOs with proven track records and the internal capacity to comply with complex administrative, reporting and financial management requirements, and has limited the opportunity for collaboration with partner-country CSOs. Furthermore, risk aversion among providers and the lack of flexibility in compliance requirements has led to a concentration of operational, security and compliance risks on partner-country CSOs, particularly for those small and grassroots organisations operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings (OECD, 2024^[10]). In fact, Adherent and CSO Respondents alike raised the need for more equitable approaches to risk-sharing among provider-country, international or partner-country CSOs as a way to better advance efforts towards LLD and to uphold the "do no harm" principle.

200. Fourth, Adherents and CSO Respondents underscored that slow progress on the harmonisation of due diligence requirements makes it even more challenging for CSOs, especially smaller and partner-country CSOs, to comply with the differing administrative, reporting and financial requirements across providers. While the need for providers to maintain robust standards is recognised, inputs from the Adherent and CSO questionnaires and consultations demonstrate that both Adherents and CSOs see that rigid provider criteria and requirements undermine effective collaboration with partner-country CSOs, particularly those operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings, which require greater flexibility.

201. Finally, amidst cuts to ODA, Adherents and CSOs Respondents alike recognised the untapped potential of pooled and collective funding mechanisms to support collaboration among organisations around shared objectives, as well as to reduce duplication, harmonise administrative and financial requirements, share risks, and potentially reach a broader range of civil society actors. For example, multi-donor pooled funds have emerged as an important modality for reaching smaller CSOs in restrictive

contexts, which often face greater capacity constraints (NEAR, 2026^[172]). However, while pooled funds offer a useful alternative to individual providers directly funding partner-country CSOs, they ought not be providers' only solution. As noted in the OECD toolkit on *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries*, pooled funds bypass key obstacles to direct funding and can come with unintended consequences such as displacing other funding mechanisms, generating competition and eliminating opportunities for providers and partner-country CSOs to benefit from direct dialogue, knowledge-sharing and relationships (OECD, 2023^[9]). CSOs also noted that while DAC members' growing emphasis on private sector engagement and blended finance can provide an opportunity for effective co-operation among sectors, it should also not lead to repercussions on the availability of grant-based financing for CSOs.

3.3. Pillar 3: Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability

IV. RECOMMENDS that Adherents, when acting in their roles as development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers, incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency, and accountability [...]

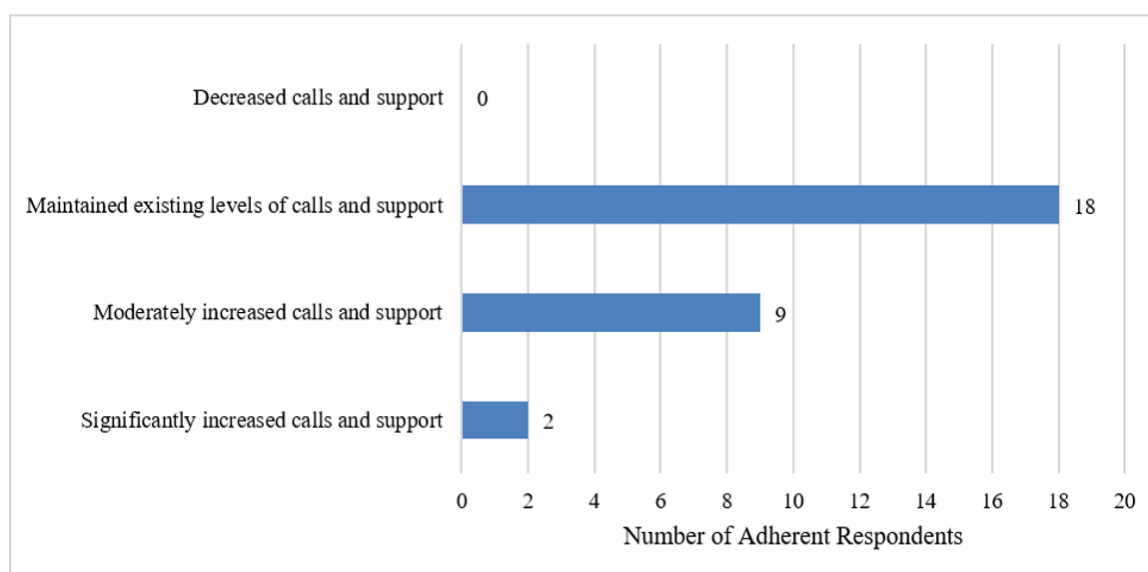
202. The third Pillar of the DAC Recommendation outlines how Adherents can incentivise CSOs' own effectiveness, transparency and accountability. The DAC Recommendation defines CSOs as "an organisational representation of civil society and include all not-for-profit, non-state, non-partisan, non-violent, and self-governing organisations outside of the family in which people come together to pursue shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith and beliefs, including formal, legally registered organisations as well as informal associations without legal status but with a structure and activities" [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)].

203. Pillar 3 of the DAC Recommendation calls on Adherents to adopt measures that include supporting voluntary CSO-led accountability standards and internal systems to uphold human rights and prevent harm, supporting CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening to build resilience and effectiveness, and promoting equitable partnerships that leverage the comparative advantages of different CSO types. The Pillar further emphasises the promotion of participatory and rights-based approaches to ensure local ownership and avoid reinforcing inequalities, while encouraging CSO leadership and innovation in addressing development and humanitarian challenges. Furthermore, it encourages Adherents to support CSOs' collaboration and co-ordination to reduce duplication, and to require alignment with relevant international standards and national regulations that respect human rights and civic space.

1. Call on and support voluntary CSO efforts to build on existing good practice and standards in CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability mechanisms to broaden CSO participation in such mechanisms.

204. Eighteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of calls on and support for CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability, while 9 indicated a moderate increase and 2 Adherent Respondents reported a significant increase in such calls and support (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12. Extent to which Adherent Respondents’ calls on and support for CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability have changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “How have your calls on and support for CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability mechanisms changed?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

205. Adherent Respondents referenced codes of conduct and contractual requirements as key instruments for promoting ethical practices, transparency and accountability among CSOs. They also noted various initiatives aimed at strengthening CSO capacity for meeting administrative, financial and reporting requirements through learning platforms, knowledge-sharing initiatives, roundtable exchanges and targeted consultations. Several Adherent Respondents stressed that capacity-strengthening support was targeted towards provider-country CSO networks, as they were highlighted as playing an important role in supporting their smaller member CSOs in strengthening alignment with transparency and accountability standards. In light of this, several Adherent Respondents reported having increased support for and engagement with umbrella organisations. Several Adherent Respondents maintain long-standing partnerships with their national CSO networks, including the Slovak Republic’s support to Ambrella, Spain’s financing of the Spanish NGO Co-ordinator, and New Zealand’s partnership with the CID. In Australia, DFAT has a formal partnership agreement in place with the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), supporting initiatives such as the ACFID Code of Conduct, which promotes transparency, accountability and ethical standards among CSOs.

206. Furthermore, several Adherent Respondents also reported endorsing or supporting CSO-led initiatives aimed at strengthening safeguarding and transparency standards. For example, Canada endorsed the Common Approach for the Protection against SEAH (CAPSEAH) in 2024, a multistakeholder initiative involving CSOs which provides guidance on SEAH prevention for organisations working in HDP settings, with specific recommendations on measures to ensure accountability and transparency (CAPSEAH, n.d.^[173]).

207. Adherent Respondents have also engaged in wider efforts to streamline and harmonise administrative requirements for civil society by simplifying MEAL processes, reducing the frequency and intensity of reporting, and harmonising processes with

international standards for reporting, including IATI and the contract award procedures for EU External Action (PRAG) (see Pillar 2, provision 6). These administrative and procedural changes were often informed by consultation with civil society and supported through relevant trainings and information sessions for CSO partners. The Netherlands has supported its CSO partners in implementing greater transparency through guided trainings on the use of IATI and the MFA's internal dashboards. Through CSO consultations, the Dutch MFA has also simplified MEAL processes under the Focus 2026-2030 policy framework by alleviating administrative burden from grant recipients. Furthermore, the Dutch MFA has organised several sessions and webinars to support CSO partners in improving the quality of evaluations, for the purpose of increasing accountability and learning.

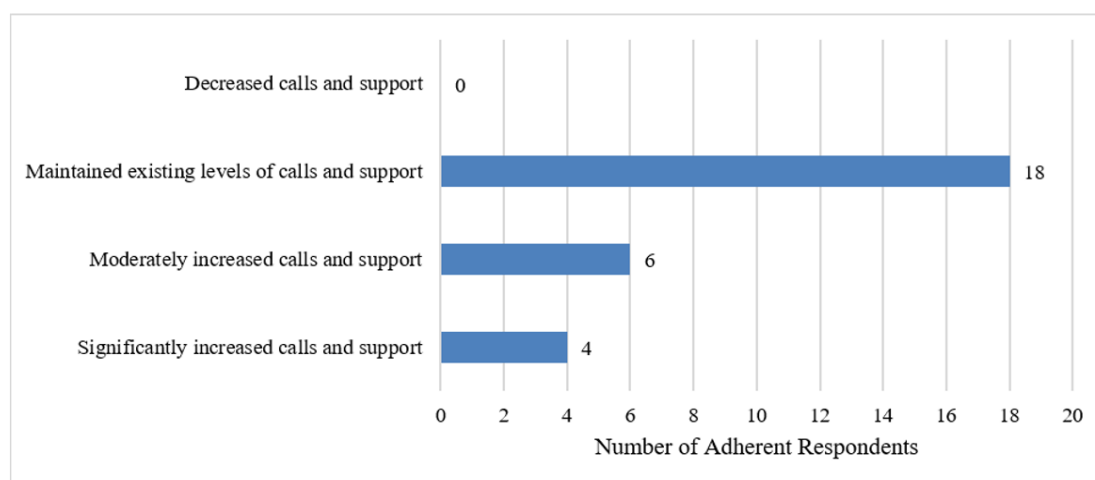
208. Among Adherent Respondents, some innovative approaches to CSO-led self-regulation have been used, including encouraging the use of participatory approaches through community feedback, peer accountability among actors working in a consortium, and the use of third-party monitoring to independently assess initiatives. These approaches reflect a recognition that accountability to affected populations and communities is critical to CSOs' long-term legitimacy and sustainability, since it is on this basis that CSOs ultimately secure the trust and acceptance of the communities they serve. In the humanitarian sector, this principle has been embedded in broader inter-agency and sector-wide standards, including through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) – the primary forum for co-ordination among UN agencies and other humanitarian actors, including CSOs – and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), a set of commitments developed jointly by providers, the UN and CSOs, against which organisations can be independently audited (IASC, n.d.^[174]; CHS, n.d.^[175]). Both initiatives prioritise the involvement of affected populations and place needs assessment at the centre of accountability. Similarly, Italy has encouraged CSO partners to adopt participatory approaches to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries and affected populations. In the Sahrawi camps in Algeria, AICS has promoted mechanisms for self-regulation and peer accountability among actors, often through the form of consortium, to enhance co-ordination and transparency.

209. In conclusion, a majority of Adherent Respondents have maintained or increased their support for CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability mechanisms. However, meaningful progress on CSO-led accountability depends on sustained investment in strengthening the organisational capacities of civil society actors, particularly with smaller and partner-country CSOs, to internalise accountability standards. Furthermore, recognition of CSO-led accountability frameworks as valid evidence remains uneven across Adherent Respondents, and support for capacity strengthening relevant to accountability and transparency initiatives remains strongly concentrated among provider-country CSO networks and platforms. Ensuring that capacity-strengthening support and CSOs' core administrative and overhead costs remain adequately resourced, while also widening recognition of CSO-led accountability frameworks, will be critical to supporting CSOs in advancing their transparency and accountability.

2. Call on and support CSOs to develop or build on existing internal systems to meet relevant human-rights standards to prevent and respond to the root causes of discrimination, exploitation, abuse, or harassment in their activities and organisations.

210. Eighteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of calls on and support for CSOs to prevent and respond to discrimination, exploitation, abuse or harassment, while 6 have moderately increased these levels and 4 Adherent Respondents have significantly increased them (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13. Extent to which Adherent Respondents’ calls on and support for CSOs to prevent and respond to discrimination, exploitation, abuse, or harassment in their activities and organisations has changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “How have your calls on and support for CSOs to prevent and respond to discrimination, exploitation, abuse, or harassment in their activities and organisations changed?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

211. Adherent Respondents have focused on institutionalising human-rights standards through codes of conduct, risk assessments, due diligence frameworks and reporting mechanisms. Several have established specific policies on preventing SEAH, or have integrated SEAH considerations into codes of ethics, and have institutionalised such standards as clauses in funding agreements and as requirements for annual reporting (see Pillar 2, provision 9). Others have established grant guidelines that embedded wider gender and protection safeguards, for example requiring CSO partners to mitigate risks of GBV and discrimination in interventions. Such standards are often complemented by resources such as guidance notes, training and awareness raising to support alignment.

212. The United Kingdom’s FCDO established a Safeguarding Unit in 2018 followed by a SEAH strategy in 2020, and supports initiatives such as Project Soteria, the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, and the Resource and Support Hub (RSH). The RSH provides free training, tools and recommendations in several languages and, between 2019 and 2025, provided mentorship to 185 CSOs, with 99% improving their safeguarding capacity (RSH, n.d.^[176]). Luxembourg has also developed training materials to help CSOs comply with its SEAH Charter (Government of Luxembourg, n.d.^[177]).

213. Spain has incorporated safeguarding and policy coherence into grant requirements, including a provision recognising the OECD’s framework for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, and requiring compliance with the Spanish Agency for International Development Co-operation (AECID) Code of Ethics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.^[178]), as well as international agreements including the UN Global Compact Principles, the UN Principles for Responsible Investment, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions on decent work, and the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

214. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents highlighted the OECD DAC Reference Group on Ending SEAH as a valuable space for exchange, and underscored their alignment with international agreements including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of

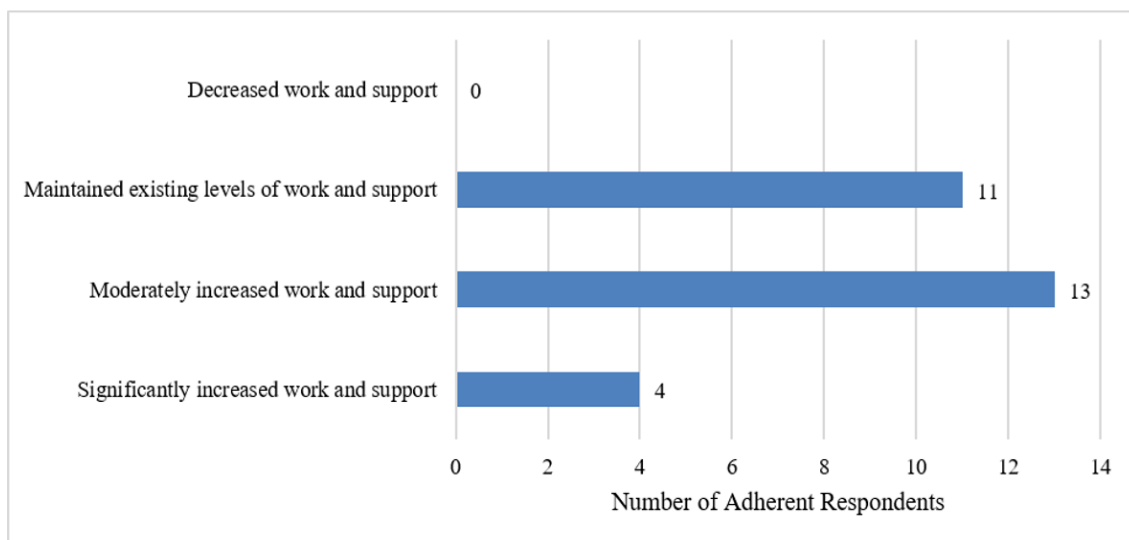
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, the DAC Recommendation on Ending SEAH, and the Whistler Declaration on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in International Assistance.

215. In conclusion, a majority of Adherent Respondents have maintained or increased their support for CSOs to develop internal systems that meet relevant human-rights standards, with a growing institutionalisation of protection safeguards, including SEAH-prevention mechanisms and gender and protection clauses within strategic frameworks, codes of conduct and funding requirements.

3. Work with and support CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening to address CSOs' vulnerabilities and bolster their resilience, accountability and effectiveness, especially at partner-country or territory level.

216. Thirteen Adherent Respondents have moderately increased work with and support for CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening, while 11 have maintained existing levels and 4 Adherent Respondents have significantly increased them (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14. Extent to which Adherent Respondents' work with and support for CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening has changed since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “How has your work with and support for CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening changed?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

217. Adherent Respondents have introduced funding instruments explicitly allocating budget lines to capacity strengthening, often integrated in funding frameworks establishing long-term strategic partnerships with civil society. Adherent Respondents cited a range of capacity-building trainings addressing protection, gender and inclusion (PGI), prevention of SEAH and on RBM. Adherent Respondents have also supported mutual capacity strengthening by supporting CSO networks and by establishing calls for proposals requiring a consortia agreement, allowing for exchange and peer learning between provider and partner-country CSOs.

218. France, through its Support Fund for Feminist Organisations (SFFO), provides grants aligned with its International Strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy 2025-2030,

targeting both feminist French and partner-country CSOs. Funded activities include sexual and reproductive health and rights, GBV prevention and women's empowerment (AFD, n.d.^[179]; Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2026^[114]). The Feminists in Action initiative, supported by the SFFO, has assisted 239 feminist organisations across 30 countries over four years, strengthening capacities and promoting networking (Feminists in Action, n.d.^[180]).

219. While much of the capacity strengthening reported by Adherent Respondents remains oriented towards strengthening CSOs' capacity, a smaller number of Adherents have also embedded mechanisms for capacity strengthening to flow in both directions, with providers themselves adjusting their practices in response to structured feedback from civil society partners. New Zealand uses partnership brokering to support this, with annual reviews enabling joint reflection on partnership quality and growth, addressing power imbalances and clarifying expectations on both sides. This approach has been applied across New Zealand's International Development Co-operation programme, as well as in partnerships with regional CSOs such as the Pacific Feminist Fund, the Pacific Disability Forum, and the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[181]).

220. Other Adherent Respondents adopt more structured approaches through dedicated programmes, rather than one-off trainings or initiatives. KOICA's Civil Society Partnership and Capacity Development Initiative offers comprehensive support to civil society partners, including through project-design training, pilot funding, policy and advocacy development, on-site partnership support and support for collaboration with the private sector (KOICA, n.d.^[182]).

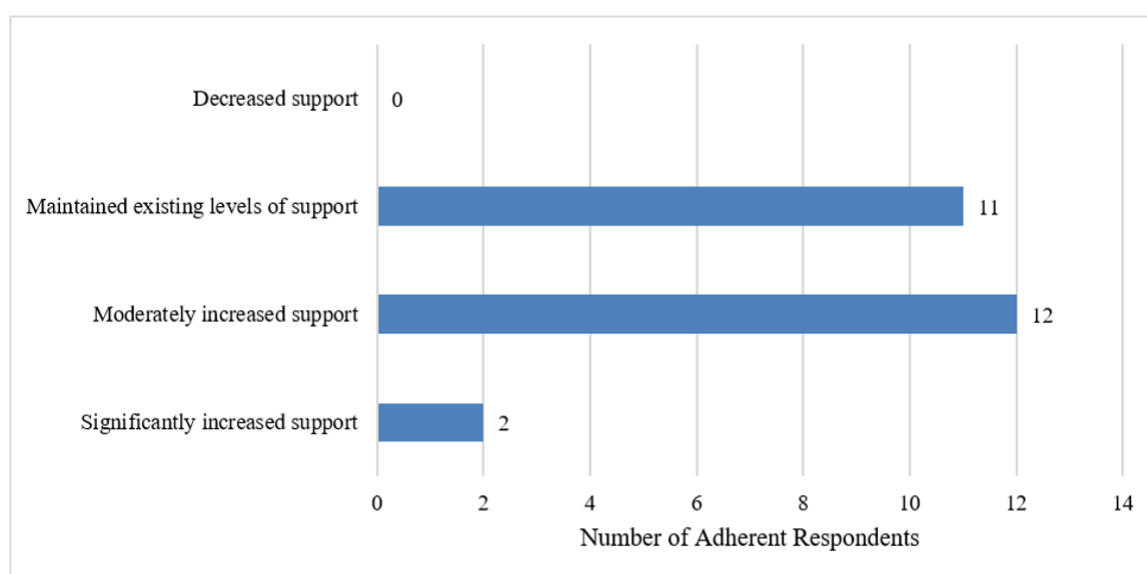
221. Furthermore, in line with LLD commitments, some Adherent Respondents are shifting towards demand-driven capacity strengthening, focusing on capacity needs identified by partner-country CSOs themselves rather than determined primarily by provider requirements. The Netherlands, for example, has embedded this approach into its Focus 2026-2030 policy, prioritising the needs identified by partner-country CSOs across areas such as programme management, financial systems and protection of vulnerable groups (Government of the Netherlands, 2025^[183]).

222. In conclusion, a majority of Adherent Respondents have moderately or significantly increased their work with and support for CSOs to implement capacity strengthening. Capacity building has been supported through long-term strategic partnerships, peer-learning mechanisms, consortia-based funding arrangements and the explicit allocation of budget lines to capacity development. However, much of the reported capacity strengthening remains oriented towards helping CSOs meet providers' own compliance and reporting requirements, rather than being demand-driven and addressing needs identified by CSOs themselves. In light of this, Adherent Respondents recognised the need for a shift towards genuine bidirectional capacity strengthening, with provider-country CSOs also learning from the knowledge and expertise of partner-country CSOs, grounded in a wider concept of capacity that equates to relevance, rootedness and constituency, as called for in the OECD *Shifting Power with Partners* toolkit (OECD, 2024^[10]). Looking ahead, given the high and broadly uniform level of reported activity on capacity strengthening across Adherent Respondents, it will be important to also consider whether resources currently directed towards fragmented or provider-driven training would be of greater value to CSOs if rebalanced towards more flexible and predictable core funding. Furthermore, greater support for South-South capacity strengthening among CSOs could also help strengthen the institutional capacities of partner-country CSOs, including their ability to diversify funding sources.

4. Support more equitable partnerships between provider-country and/or international CSOs, and the partner-country or territory CSOs they work with in which the comparative advantages of each type of CSO are appropriately drawn from.

223. Twelve Adherent Respondents have moderately increased support for more equitable partnerships between provider-country or international CSOs and partner-country CSOs, while 11 have maintained existing levels of support and 2 Adherent Respondents have significantly increased support (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15. Extent to which Adherent Respondents' support for more equitable partnerships between provider-country and/or international CSOs, and the partner-country CSOs they work with, has changed since 2021



Note: 25 Adherent Respondents to the question “How has your support for more equitable partnerships between provider country and/or international CSOs, and the partner country CSOs they work with changed?”.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

224. Adherent Respondents have established equitable partnerships as a criteria for programme selection, with several requiring collaboration with partner-country CSOs throughout all stages of the programme cycle, and their role as lead or co-applicants to ensure local ownership. For example, Italy has promoted equitable partnerships in emergency programming in Ukraine, with AICS actively encouraging Ukrainian CSOs to participate as lead applicants within project consortia, and with Italian CSOs providing administrative and managerial support in a complementary role.

225. Furthermore, specific funding modalities have been employed to reach smaller and more remote partners that may not meet eligibility criteria for direct support. Adherent Respondents also referred to the allocation of a percentage of project funds to partner-country CSOs' overhead-cost management to support capacity strengthening. Finally, evaluations were also cited as valuable instruments for establishing what is needed to deliver more equitable partnerships.

226. For example, the EU's Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is a mechanism that allows grant beneficiaries to re-grant funding (i.e. cascade funding) to actors who would otherwise face challenges in competing for EU funding, such as partner-country

CSOs, grassroots organisations, local authorities, or individuals such as activists, HRDs or refugees (European Commission, n.d.^[184]). This approach allows for support to reach smaller and more remote beneficiaries in partner countries and is increasingly adopted in EU-funded civil society programmes, where it accounts for a growing share of programme budgets.

227. New Zealand’s Partnering for Impact programme is in part delivered through “negotiated partnerships”, which are co-investment arrangements between provider and partner-country CSOs that target shared development outcomes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, n.d.^[66]). Negotiated partnerships are driven by a locally led approach, in that they require provider-country CSOs to pass on at least 50% of the funding for management support costs to a partner-country CSO, enhancing local partners’ involvement in the design, delivery and monitoring of programmes (OECD, 2023^[109]).

228. In conclusion, while Adherents have made efforts to promote more equitable partnerships between provider, international and partner-country CSOs, a persistent structural imbalance continues to constrain progress. Despite efforts to embed equitable partnership principles in programme design – including through mandatory local co-applicant requirements, overhead cost allocations and cascade funding mechanisms – significant challenges remain. Differences in organisational capacity, administrative infrastructure and familiarity with provider eligibility and reporting requirements frequently prevent partner-country CSOs from accessing funding directly or participating as genuine equals in programme design and management. These challenges are compounded by funding that tends to be heavily earmarked, characterised by short budget cycles, limited flexibility in budget adaptation, and low coverage of indirect costs (OECD, 2023^[9]). Progress on equitable partnerships will require efforts to reconfigure providers’ risk-averse mindsets along with the administrative processes and funding models that currently favour established, provider-country-based and international organisations over partner-country CSOs.

5. Promote participatory and rights-based approaches for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities throughout programme design, implementation, and monitoring, while helping ensure that programmes do not exacerbate existing forms of discrimination or inequalities.

229. Thirteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of effort to promote participatory and rights-based approaches for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities, while 12 indicated a moderate increase in efforts and 1 Adherent Respondent had significantly increased efforts.

230. In line with commitments to LLD and effective development co-operation, Adherent Respondents have stated that attention to participatory and rights-based approaches are often reflected in programme selection processes, with participatory approaches explicitly required in calls for proposals. For example, the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is a decentralised programme that promotes local ownership and participatory approaches by funding projects led by small partner-country CSOs which lead design and implementation based on self-identified needs and priorities (Government of Canada, 2026^[185]). The CFLI has funded approximately 650 projects annually in over 120 ODA-eligible countries since its inception, with the aim of supporting CSOs which may not always qualify for funding from larger providers (Government of Canada, 2026^[185]).

231. One Adherent Respondent reported using participatory capacity-needs assessments to inform targeted capacity-strengthening initiatives, while open consultations with CSOs have also been used to ensure funding and administrative processes are flexible and accessible to local civil society actors. Adherent Respondents also reported aligning with

other international frameworks such as GEDSI and human rights-based approaches (HRBA), which are increasingly embedded in programme design templates and for which supportive guidance is often developed. New Zealand, Sweden and Slovenia have all integrated HRBA when considering project proposals, which has contributed to supporting programmes that emphasise local ownership by and accountability of CSOs.

232. In conclusion, an equal proportion of Adherent Respondents reported either maintaining existing levels of effort or increasing efforts to promote participatory and rights-based approaches for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities. These efforts have primarily been advanced through the integration of relevant criteria into programme-selection processes, calls for proposals and project-design templates, as well as through alignment with established frameworks such as HRBA and GEDSI. However, to effectively promote local ownership and accountability, participatory and rights-based principles should be embedded throughout the entire programme cycle, including in implementation and monitoring, rather than being confined to the project design stage.

6. Foster CSO leadership and innovation in identifying and adapting new approaches to solving development and humanitarian challenges, including through partnerships and co-creation with a range of actors.

233. Twelve Adherent Respondents indicated a moderate increase in efforts to foster CSO leadership and innovation in identifying and adapting new approaches to solving development and humanitarian challenges, while the other 12 reported having maintained existing effort levels.

234. Some Adherent Respondents have established funding frameworks which provide financial support and technical assistance to CSOs to design, pilot and scale innovative programmes, while several more indirectly contribute to CSO leadership and innovation through capacity-strengthening programmes. For example, Australia launched the Innovative Indo-Pacific Accelerator in 2024, providing direct financial support to CSOs in designing, piloting and scaling innovative projects, and enabling them to act as impact managers, technical-assistance providers and fund managers in blended-finance transactions (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, 2024^[186]). By addressing structural barriers to CSO participation in development finance, the Accelerator fosters leadership and innovation among CSOs.

235. Adherent Respondents underscored a growing emphasis on engaging with civil society actors such as youth and social movements, and in targeting innovative approaches for key humanitarian and development sectors including agriculture and health. For example, in 2025, the Cool Czechia programme invited 20 young African leaders to engage with Czechia's MFA on key issues relevant to development co-operation and to network with Czech public officials, civil society actors, journalists and academics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2025^[187]). In addition, the EU Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) has emphasised innovative approaches to fostering CSO leadership, such as through Youth Sounding Boards, which are present in most EU delegations, and provide an opportunity for a panel of youth leaders to give feedback and shape EU policies on development and humanitarian affairs, among other policy areas. Some Adherent Respondents also noted that flexible, core-based funding can serve as an enabling condition for CSO leadership and innovation, by giving CSOs greater discretion over how resources are used.

236. In conclusion, Adherent Respondents reported broadly stable or moderately increased efforts to foster CSO leadership and innovation, often through dedicated funding frameworks, capacity-strengthening programmes and platforms. However, few Adherent

Respondents treat CSO innovation as an absolute priority, with most supporting it as a by-product of broader capacity-building or engagement efforts, rather than through dedicated mechanisms that let CSOs take risks and test new approaches. This is driven by a wider risk-averse institutional culture among providers, where strict reporting, close monitoring and earmarked budgets leave CSOs little room to experiment. Adapting funding modalities to allow for greater flexibility would therefore be key to supporting CSOs' leadership and innovation.

7. Encourage, and support as appropriate, CSOs' voluntary initiatives to collaborate and co-ordinate among themselves and with all levels of partner-country or territory governments, to avoid duplication and competition, and build mutual respect, trust, and accountability.

237. Thirteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing levels of encouragement and support for CSOs' voluntary initiatives to collaborate and co-ordinate among themselves and with all levels of partner-country governments, while 10 have moderately increased levels of encouragement and support.

238. A number of Adherent Respondents have supported co-ordination among CSOs through assistance to CSO networks and platforms, while also making partnerships with partner-country CSOs a requirement of calls for proposals as a way of promoting local ownership and more equitable partnerships. At the same time, in the context of decreasing ODA budgets, Adherent Respondents acknowledged that the use of calls for proposals may be heightening a competitive environment among CSOs. Adherent Respondents also reported having supported CSO participation and representation in international, regional and national policy forums, advisory platforms and co-ordination groups at both the provider and partner-country levels, as well as outreach initiatives to strengthen local response networks in fragile contexts. For example, the EU supports the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), which provides a space for multistakeholder dialogue on EU development policies and brings together a wide range of participants including CSO networks, local authorities, business associations, trade unions, diaspora groups and co-operatives (PFD, n.d.^[188]).

239. Beyond platforms convened by Adherent Respondents themselves, some have supported CSO-led networks in building their own co-ordination capacity with other types of development actors. France, for example, has aided the international CSO network, Forus, in strengthening dialogue between CSOs and public development banks (PDBs) within the Finance in Common (FiCS) coalition, which brings together over 550 PDBs (FiCS, n.d.^[189]). Through this programme, Forus produced a report and toolkit on CSO engagement with PDBs, offering practical guidance to facilitate more effective interaction (Forus, n.d.^[190]).

240. Several Adherent Respondents also reported creating co-ordination platforms and facilitating regular exchange meetings among CSOs through local offices to avoid duplication and promote synergies in interventions. Italy supports collaboration among CSOs in its country programmes by facilitating regular meetings through AICS' local offices. These exchanges promote alignment, peer learning and synergies, as illustrated by the co-ordination platform in Tirana, Albania, which has strengthened collaboration among international, provider and partner-country CSOs operating locally.

241. In conclusion, while there is some Adherent support for co-ordination, these efforts more frequently target co-ordination among CSOs, and occasionally with other actors. Additional emphasis could be placed on encouraging and supporting CSO co-ordination with partner-country governments at all levels, as an investment in building mutual respect

and trust, and providing opportunities for CSOs to demonstrate their accountability at partner-country level.

8. Require, as appropriate, CSO partners to respect relevant international standards and adhere to relevant legal and regulatory requirements in the partner countries or territories they work in, where such requirements respect human rights and open civic space.

242. Sixteen Adherent Respondents have maintained existing requirements for CSO partners to respect human rights in the partner countries they work in, with 15 requiring respect to relevant international standards and 12 demanding adherence to relevant legal and regulatory requirements in the partner countries they work in. One Adherent Respondent reported having placed no such requirements on CSOs, and one other reported having made other types of requirements.

243. On adherence to relevant legal and regulatory requirements in partner countries, some Adherent Respondents have required funded partner CSOs to respect partner-country laws, labour standards and local governance requirements, ensuring that CSO activities respect democratic principles and the rule of law. Furthermore, some Adherent Respondents have developed criteria on civic space as part of the selection criteria for programmes, with applicants needing to demonstrate their contribution to safeguarding or expanding local civic space through theories of change.

244. Finland, for example, requires CSOs to align with the “do no harm” principle to be eligible for development funding, such as by ensuring their activities do not have unintended consequences on human rights. It has also recently added the advancement of open civic space as a criterion for selection. Similarly, the Netherlands places HRBA at the core of its civil society programmes and, under its Strengthening Civil Society 2021-2025 policy framework, requires all programmes to assess and address civic space as part of their design and implementation (Government of the Netherlands, 2022^[144]).

245. In addition, Adherent Respondents have required adherence to relevant international standards, including on human rights, with several asking CSOs to adopt and publish a code of ethics and conduct, and to demonstrate organisational measures to prevent SEAH and GBV (see Pillar 2, provision 9 and Pillar 3, provision 2). Compliance with international standards is reinforced through contractual obligations, reporting mechanisms and risk assessments to safeguard ethical practices and prevent harm. Adherent Respondents also referenced alignment with frameworks such as the DAC Recommendation and the integration of rights-based approaches, including GEDSI and HRBA, into programme-design templates and guidance.

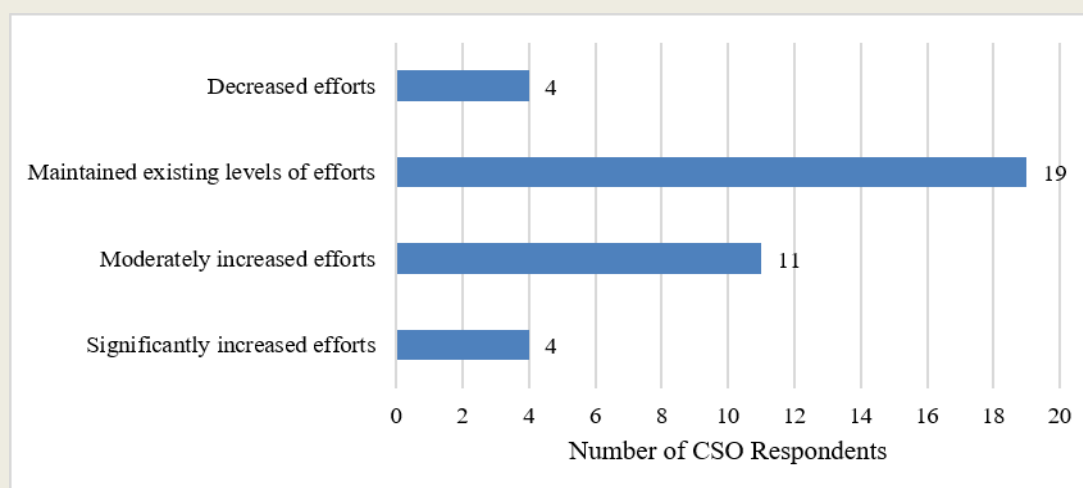
246. In conclusion, a large majority of Adherent Respondents maintain requirements for CSO partners to respect human rights, international standards and partner-country legal and regulatory frameworks, often reinforced through contractual obligations, selection criteria and risk assessments. However, requirements to comply with partner-country legal and regulatory frameworks should be applied in a human-rights-sensitive manner. In contexts where partner-country laws restrict fundamental freedoms or are used to harass civil society, Adherents should avoid creating compliance dilemmas for CSOs. Instead, they should support legal analysis and risk mitigation to help CSOs operate safely within the laws in such environments, while also advancing protection measures and advocacy to bring restrictive partner-country laws closer to international human-rights standard.

Box 3.3. CSOs' perspectives on Adherents' efforts to implement Pillar 3

Across the CSO questionnaire and throughout consultations, CSOs recognised some positive developments in DAC members' efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability. However, persisting risk aversion, strict compliance expectations and lack of flexibility constrain the ability of providers to effectively incentivise CSOs' accountability, particularly among smaller and partner-country CSOs.

In the CSO questionnaire, 19 CSO Respondents reported that DAC members' efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability have been maintained since 2021, while 11 reported that these efforts had moderately increased, 4 that they had significantly increased, and 4 CSO Respondents that they had decreased (Figure 3.16).

Figure 3.16. CSO Respondents on the extent to which DAC members' efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability have changed since 2021



Note: 35 CSO Respondents to the question: "To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability since 2021?". As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: CSO questionnaire.

First, CSO Respondents recognised growing progress in Adherents' support for CSO capacity strengthening and peer learning, which the CSOs viewed as a means of working towards more equitable partnerships. Adherents have developed programmes and funds focused on capacity strengthening that is specifically targeted at smaller or partner-country CSOs, with a growing emphasis on supporting CSO-identified priorities. Furthermore, criteria regarding partnership modalities or re-granting models have been established to ensure greater inclusivity of smaller and partner-country based CSOs in larger consortia as sub-grantees. According to CSO Respondents, support to CSO networks and platforms has also been a way through which DAC members have pursued an approach to CSO accountability centred on mutual learning.

Second, CSO Respondents noted an increased willingness among DAC members to provide greater flexibility to CSOs operating in restrictive, conflict-affected and fragile contexts. For example, several CSO Respondents noted that DAC members have been increasingly focused on RBM, in parallel to a growing emphasis on LLD activities

through the direct involvement of partner-country CSOs in the design and implementation of programmes.

Despite this progress, CSOs argued that accountability efforts to date have remained largely one-directional and focused on strengthening CSOs' own systems rather than on the accountability of providers themselves. In light of this, several CSO Respondents called for accountability to function in both directions, noting that providers' accountability towards CSOs has remained comparatively weak. They also called on Adherents to publish information regarding their own criteria, results and performance in supporting civil society, and to directly involve CSOs in defining what success looks like, rather than relying solely on provider-defined indicators.

Furthermore, CSO Respondents argued that the provider focus is on compliance-driven accountability and that CSO-led accountability standards are not yet sufficiently recognised by Adherents as valid evidence of accountability and effectiveness. CSOs have led a range of accountability frameworks, including: the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, a certification scheme built around ten universal accountability commitments (Global Standard for CSO Accountability, n.d.^[191]); Accountable Now, a global CSO-led membership platform which supports its members in advancing their transparency, accountability and effectiveness (Accountable Now, n.d.^[192]); the CHS, a set of commitments organisations can be independently audited against to demonstrate the quality and accountability of their work to the communities they serve (CHS, n.d.^[175]); and a wide range of national and regional platform-level codes of conduct and peer-review mechanisms. CSOs called on Adherents to more consistently recognise these CSO-led accountability and transparency frameworks – as well as national platform codes, regional accountability standards and global CSO-developed standards – within their due diligence and reporting systems. According to CSOs, this would reduce duplication, strengthen local ownership of accountability and potentially minimise imposing parallel provider-driven systems.

Third, while CSOs across the CSO questionnaire and in consultations recognised an increased focus on capacity strengthening amongst Adherents, they also stressed that strict financial management and audit requirements continue to disproportionately burden smaller and partner-country CSOs, who often lack resources for certifications, systems and long-term investments in accountability. Moreover, short project cycles and rigid budgets further limit their ability to build core components of CSO effectiveness and accountability including institutional knowledge, staff retention and the implementation of robust MEAL. CSOs also stressed that current funding modalities limit their ability to invest in stronger internal systems for transparency and accountability, a constraint likely to deepen as ongoing ODA cuts risk resulting in reduced availability of predictable, flexible funding.

CSOs also noted that there continues to be a lack of proportionality applied to auditing and reporting standards for partner-country CSOs, which often have lower internal capacity to comply with them. Furthermore, CSOs noted that the need to comply with providers' strict accountability and transparency requirements may shift the focus of CSOs towards prioritising compliance with provider requirements over programme delivery.

In fact, CSOs noted the presence of a risk-averse administrative culture among providers as curbing the potential for more flexible and innovative funding approaches that would promote greater effectiveness for CSOs in responding to development and humanitarian challenges. One CSO Respondent argued that the level of risk tolerance often applied to private sector investments is not extended to CSO work, which also requires some degree

of risk-taking to achieve meaningful and long-term development outcomes. Linked to DAC members' administrative cultures, CSOs recognised that overregulation is often rooted in the authorising environment in provider countries, meaning that there is also a need to collaborate with other provider-country actors (e.g. tax authorities, auditing oversight bodies) to lower administrative requirement thresholds and facilitate CSOs' access to resources.

CSO Respondents also stressed a growing risk of countries using transparency and accountability standards to control and undermine CSOs. They further reported that in some partner countries, government pressure and restrictive laws against CSOs are growing without corresponding increases in DAC members' support for risk-mitigation, legal defence and organisational capacity strengthening. In these contexts, transparency requirements can expose civil society actors to risks due to surveillance or prosecution. Faced with this, CSO Respondents argued that accountability and transparency requirements should be paired with the inclusion of risk-mitigation resources in programme design, such as in the form of digital security and legal defence, to ensure CSOs can comply without increasing their exposure to risks.

Overall, CSOs called for implementation of this Pillar of the DAC Recommendation to support "safe" accountability, meaning measures regarding accountability, transparency and effectiveness that strengthen civil society's legitimacy and learning without exposing CSOs to surveillance, prosecution, administrative harassment or reputational attacks. This is particularly relevant in restrictive contexts, with CSOs stressing that accountability requirements must be assessed in relation to legal safety, digital security, access to resources and protection from retaliation.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

Overarching implementation challenges for Pillar 3

247. The implementation of Pillar 3 of the DAC Recommendation on incentivising CSO accountability, transparency and effectiveness presents multiple challenges for Adherents, summarised as follows:

- a persistent tension between accountability requirements and the operational capacity of civil society actors – particularly smaller and partner-country CSOs – which can shift focus away from programme delivery towards compliance;
- insufficient recognition of CSO-led accountability standards, limiting accountability towards affected populations and reinforcing upward accountability to providers;
- limited harmonisation of provider requirements, leading to duplication and increased administrative burdens for both Adherents and CSOs;
- the risk of accountability and transparency standards being instrumentalised in ways that restrict civic space;
- limited access to flexible, long-term core and programme-based funding, constraining CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability;
- capacity-strengthening efforts that remain largely provider-driven; and
- the untapped potential of the DAC Recommendation to further advance progress under this Pillar, including through enhanced guidance, dialogue with CSOs and other development actors, and broader dissemination.

248. This section outlines these challenges in greater detail.

249. First, a key challenge recognised by Adherents and CSO Respondents concerns the tension between accountability requirements and the operational capacity of civil society actors to meet them. While transparency and due diligence requirements are essential to ensuring the responsible use of public funds, they can impose significant constraints on CSOs, particularly smaller and partner-country CSOs with limited administrative and financial management capacity. A 2025 Eurobarometer survey found that 42% of respondents identified excessive administrative barriers as one of the main difficulties faced by CSOs in their respective countries, highlighting the difficulties that CSOs encounter in navigating administrative processes, including accountability and reporting requirements (Eurobarometer, 2025^[193]). Adherents and CSO Respondents echoed these findings, noting that complex financial reporting procedures, language barriers in documentation requirements and the level of detail required for compliance can divert considerable time and resources away from programmatic delivery for both provider and partner-country CSOs.

250. Furthermore, Adherent and CSO Respondents recognised that this administrative burden falls disproportionately on smaller and partner-country CSOs, due to their sometimes-limited institutional capacity in meeting extensive documentation, reporting and transparency requirements. The difficulties for smaller and partner-country CSOs in meeting accountability and transparency requirements tend to increase the perceived reputational, financial and operational risk associated with collaborating with them. In fact, a 2020 OECD survey found that over three-quarters of DAC member respondents identified limited CSO capacity as the main disadvantage for working with partner-country CSOs (OECD, 2020^[3]). As a result, resources tend to be concentrated among international and provider-country CSOs with proven track records and the internal capacity to meet due diligence requirements. Adherents and CSO Respondents noted that such risk aversion perpetuates long-standing power imbalances in development co-operation and slows progress towards more LLD approaches. CSOs stressed that addressing this challenge requires greater trust, clearer articulation by DAC members of acceptable risk thresholds and the application of accountability standards that are realistic and proportionate to local operating contexts and the types of civil society actors that partnerships are sought with.

251. Adherents and CSO Respondents both recognised that complex administrative and reporting processes can inadvertently shift CSOs' focus away from programme delivery towards compliance. CSO Respondents emphasised that due diligence and accountability requirements should therefore be proportionate and adapted to organisational capacity and contextual risk. In fact, CSOs' ability to demonstrate accountability and effectiveness is itself shaped by the conditions under which they can access funding, which can be constrained by foreign funding restrictions, taxation on grants, and other regulatory and administrative barriers. In this sense, accountability and civic space concerns are closely intertwined, as a CSOs' capacity to meet accountability standards cannot be assessed independently of the legal and operational constraints it faces in accessing and managing resources. Some Adherent Respondents further noted that, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the implementation of Pillar 3 should be balanced with the prioritisation of Pillars 1 and 2 of the DAC Recommendation, given deteriorating enabling environments and heightened threats to civic space.

252. Second, as regards to CSO-led accountability efforts, CSO Respondents noted that CSO-led standards – such as the Global Standard for CSO Accountability – are not yet sufficiently or consistently recognised by DAC members as valid evidence of effectiveness and accountability. While both sets of Respondents highlighted the value of CSO-led accountability frameworks and voluntary standards as complementary approaches that can

reinforce trust and effectiveness, CSO Respondents noted that there is limited attention from DAC members to CSO-led self-regulation efforts. One Adherent Respondent also noted that the sensitive nature of transparency and accountability can make it difficult for CSOs to acknowledge weaknesses in their systems and operations. Adherent and CSO Respondents agreed that discussions on accountability and transparency should therefore be grounded in trust, dialogue and mutual capacity strengthening, rather than purely compliance-driven.

253. Adherent and CSO Respondents also recognised that providers' accountability requirements tend to focus on the responsible use of public funds and are therefore generally oriented towards accountability to providers. Meanwhile, CSO-led self-regulation efforts place significant emphasis on accountability to the affected populations and wider citizenry CSOs serve or represent. While this dimension of accountability is essential to CSOs' legitimacy, local ownership and long-term sustainability, it remains insufficiently integrated in providers' assessments of CSO accountability. CSO Respondents also emphasised the importance of reciprocal accountability, whereby providers' accountability to CSOs, local partners and affected populations is recognised alongside CSOs' own accountability towards providers.

254. Third, an additional challenge relates to the limited harmonisation of provider requirements. Adherents and CSO Respondents alike underscored the need to further align reporting templates, safeguarding standards and risk-management tools to reduce duplication and administrative burden both on Adherents and CSOs. At the same time, during consultation, CSOs cautioned that excessive harmonisation may risk homogenising programming and partner selection, potentially limiting innovation, narrowing the reach of provider funding, and potentially excluding emerging or grassroots CSOs amongst others (see Pillar 2, provision 6).

255. Fourth, Adherents and CSO Respondents also recognised the risk that instrumentalisation of accountability and transparency standards presents to restricting civic space, and thus a key obstacle to implementing Pillar 3 of the DAC Recommendation. In some partner countries, governments have used transparency requirements to control and intimidate civil society actors, especially those representing politically sensitive groups, through mechanisms including complex CSO-registration procedures, disclosure demands and politically motivated audits and investigations (Balloumi, 2026^[194]). Furthermore, AML/CTF measures have been utilised by some governments to intimidate, threaten and repress civil society actors, with government watchdogs, journalists and opposition groups being particularly targeted (Reimer, 2026^[195]). According to Adherents and CSO Respondents, these developments represent a double threat by directly impeding CSOs' ability to operate, while also delegitimising the very accountability and transparency norms that underpin an enabling environment for civil society.

256. While the instrumentalisation of accountability and transparency standards is most pronounced in partner countries, CSO Respondents noted that this has also taken place in some provider countries. According to a 2024 survey by FRA, surveyed CSOs in the EU reported experiencing a range of incidents including excessive administrative controls or audits by authorities (36% stipulating "often" or "sometimes"), as well as the criminalisation of humanitarian aid, suspected surveillance by law enforcement and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) (FRA, 2026^[82]). Several provider countries have introduced foreign-influence and transparency registration schemes that risk placing disproportionate burdens on civil society actors and having chilling effects on their ability to operate (Robinson, 2025^[170]).

257. In addition, across questionnaires and consultations, Adherents and CSOs further identified expanded access to flexible, long-term core and programme-based funding as a

critical enabler of CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Such funding allows CSOs to invest in institutional capacity strengthening, learning, innovation and impact evaluation. CSO Respondents also underlined the importance of explicitly resourcing MEAL functions within grant budgets, as well as supporting collaborative and peer-learning initiatives to facilitate the exchange of good practices. CSO Respondents noted that providers often regard accountability as an overhead cost rather than a core function essential to effectiveness and transparency and thus needing to be adequately resourced.

258. Furthermore, Adherent and CSO Respondents raised concerns regarding the extent to which capacity-strengthening investments are genuinely demand-driven and reflective of CSOs' own priorities. While some Adherents have shifted towards identifying capacity needs in consultation with CSOs themselves, much of the capacity building reported remains oriented towards equipping CSOs to meet providers' administrative, financial and reporting requirements. CSOs further noted that capacity-strengthening support across providers tends to be fragmented and insufficiently co-ordinated, with limited harmonisation of approaches and a risk of duplicating efforts or overburdening CSOs with provider-specific training. Adherents and CSO Respondents agreed that a stronger orientation towards CSO-identified needs would help ensure that such investments translate into more sustainable gains for CSOs' institutional resilience. Moreover, approaches are needed for more genuinely mutual capacity strengthening, wherein the varied capacities of both provider-country and partner-country CSOs are valued and exchanged in relationships of reciprocity.

259. Finally, Adherent and CSO Respondents expressed several ways in which the DAC Recommendation could be better leveraged to advance progress on Pillar 3. Adherent Respondents stressed the need to create spaces for dialogue among CSOs, partner-country governments and providers to align strategies for promoting CSO accountability and transparency, including engagement with non-DAC providers. Adherents and CSO Respondents both called for the development of guidance materials on Pillar 3, such as toolkits and the organisation of events to exchange on best practices. Adherent and CSO Respondents highlighted the DAC Recommendation's potential to drive harmonisation of requirements, including financial, safeguarding and MEAL standards, such as through the CoP sub-group on harmonisation.

260. Adherent and CSO Respondents further noted that the DAC Recommendation could serve as a foundation for strengthening or establishing peer-learning platforms wherein CSOs and providers might jointly reflect on challenges and innovations related to CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability. CSO Respondents also stressed the need for wider dissemination of the DAC Recommendation, particularly among partner-country CSOs, and for stronger linkages with existing international frameworks, such as the CHS and the Grand Bargain, to enhance coherence and reinforce sector-wide accountability norms. Additionally, CSO Respondents recommended supporting CSO-led accountability mechanisms, such as the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, to reinforce voluntary and sector-driven approaches.

3.4. Support to the implementation of the DAC Recommendation

261. Since its adoption in July 2021, the OECD Secretariat has undertaken a series of measures to support Adherents in implementing the DAC Recommendation. Recognising that many of its provisions are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, an initial clustering and prioritisation of provisions was conducted in 2021, based on a survey and discussions with the DAC CoP on Civil Society, and informed by input from the CSO RG. A second planning and priorities survey [DCD/DAC(2025)9] was carried out with the CoP in April

2024 to further guide prioritisation and forward planning (OECD, 2025^[196]). Building on the thematic priorities identified through these exercises, the OECD Secretariat developed toolkits to provide practical guidance on how the 28 provisions can be implemented in practice.

262. To date, three toolkits have been published: *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries* (OECD, 2023^[9]), *Shifting Power with Partners* (OECD, 2024^[10]) and *Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space* (OECD, 2025^[11]). The DAC CoP on Civil Society identified LLD as a key priority for strengthening local ownership and supporting partner-country civil society as independent development actors. The first two toolkits serve this overarching goal, while the third toolkit focuses on actions for respecting, protecting and promoting civic space in partner countries, as also prioritised by the CoP. The toolkits were developed through desk research, peer-learning exchanges and the sharing of practices, in particular with the DAC CoP on Civil Society and the CSO RG. For each toolkit, the CoP established dedicated sub-groups (Sounding Boards), with participation from CSO RG members from both the Global South and North.

263. The OECD DAC Civil Society Days (CSDs) are a prominent example of implementation support. The CSDs are a biennial forum that explores challenges facing civil society and fosters dialogue across a wide range of stakeholders including DAC members, non-DAC OECD Members, CSOs, partner-country governments, multilateral institutions, academics and philanthropic actors. They provide a vital platform for the DAC and its partners to engage, identify opportunities and address obstacles to a shared vision of enabling civil society as independent development actors. The 2023 edition of the CSDs served as an important checkpoint on progress in disseminating and implementing the DAC Recommendation, reflecting on achievements and addressing remaining gaps. The most recent edition, held in June 2025 under the theme of protecting civic space in a turbulent world, combined dissemination and implementation support with a focus on challenges and on areas of the DAC Recommendation needing increased emphasis in the rapidly changing development co-operation landscape [DCD(2026)2] (OECD, 2025^[197]).

264. The OECD Secretariat has also supported lesson learning, adaptation and sharing best practices to strengthen understanding and implementation of the DAC Recommendation. Examples include analysis of the DAC Recommendation's applicability in the Ukraine context [DCD/DAC/RD(2022)8] (OECD, 2022^[198]) and a knowledge-sharing session on localising support to CSOs in development co-operation, convened in March 2022 with the CoP on Civil Society and the CSO RG. In November 2025, the Secretariat hosted a webinar on Enabling Civil Society and Civic Space in a Changing Landscape, which highlighted the continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation, key guidance from the toolkits, and underscored lessons learned by providers in implementation [DCD(2026)3].

265. The OECD Secretariat has also provided implementation support to countries in the process of joining the DAC and new DAC members, as well as to select non-DAC members that engage with the Committee. For example, in July 2023, the OECD organised a seminar with Romania as part of a roadmap for policy reform agreed between the MFA of Romania and the Agency for International Development Co-operation (RoAid). The seminar focused on guidance for partnering with civil society in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance, drawing on the DAC Recommendation. Following its accession to the DAC in November 2022, Lithuania received guidance from the Secretariat between 2024 and 2025 on improving the enabling environment for effective partnerships with CSOs, both domestically and in partner countries, in line with the DAC Recommendation and its associated toolkits. This guidance was provided in the context of an OECD project with the EU Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG

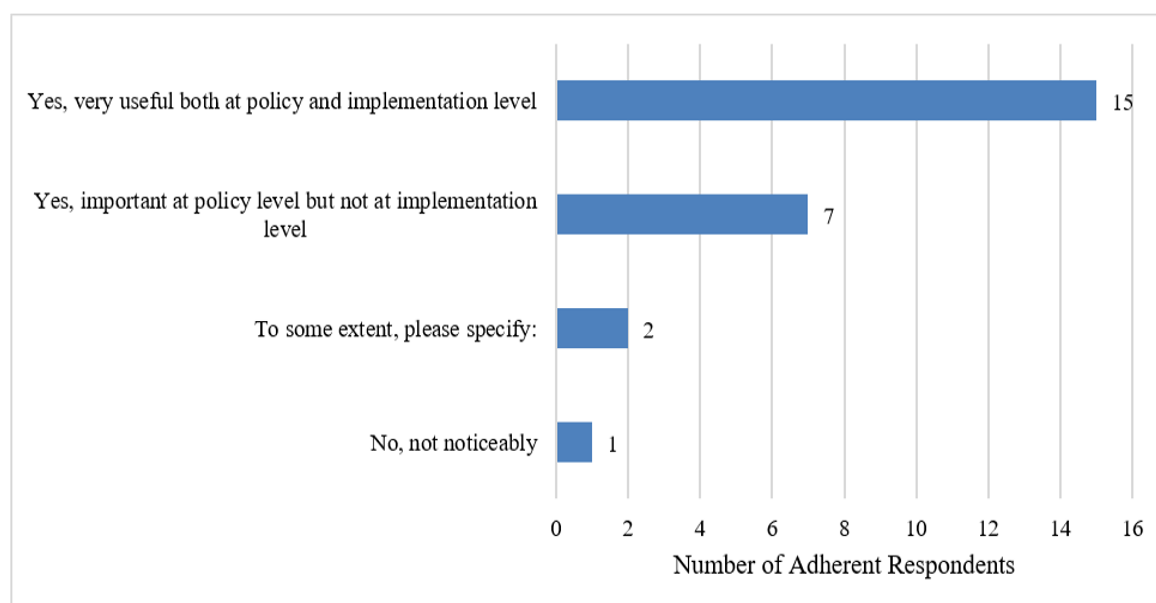
REFORM) with Lithuania. In February 2026, the Secretariat also led a session during a workshop organised under the DAC's Global Engagement (GE) programme with Croatia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs on Engagement with Civil Society and Public Communication. The workshop brought together representatives from various line ministries involved in development co-operation and the Office for Co-operation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and facilitated discussions on how Croatia can strengthen civil society engagement and build more effective partnerships with CSOs across its development co-operation system.

266. The OECD Secretariat has also provided ad hoc implementation support in response to needs expressed by CoP members, often through seminars or workshops (see Section 4. Dissemination). Further implementation support is being provided through policy briefs, including a forthcoming brief aimed at assisting DAC members in communicating the value of support to civil society and open civic space in ways that resonate with policymakers' strategic and national interests in their respective countries in today's development co-operation context.

267. The Secretariat collaborates horizontally across the OECD to integrate the DAC Recommendation into relevant policy work, thereby supporting implementation by Adherents and ensuring coherence in OECD approaches to civil society. For example, the Secretariat helped identify CoP members to participate in country deep dives and provided substantive contributions to the OECD report *Pathways towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation* (OECD, 2024^[199]), which aims to build a shared understanding of LLD co-operation and provides examples of related policies, financing mechanisms, partnerships and management approaches. The Secretariat has also contributed to the report *The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance* (OECD, 2022^[200]) and its follow-up, the *Practical Guide for Policymakers on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space* (OECD, 2024^[201]), particularly with regard to promoting a coherent approach to protecting civic space both domestically and in non-OECD Member States. Further inputs were provided to the working paper *Towards Meaningful Civil Society Participation at the International Level: Success Factors, Opportunities, and Challenges* (OECD, 2025^[202]), highlighting the DAC Recommendation, as well as to the forthcoming *Guidance on Reducing Poverty and Inequalities through Development Co-operation* (OECD, forthcoming^[203]). Contributions have also been made to draft policy briefs on working with civil society to support democracy and development in politically constrained environments (OECD, forthcoming^[204]) and on responding to shrinking civic space in politically constrained environments (OECD, forthcoming^[205]), as well as to the *Practical Guidelines for Supporting Locally Led Development* (OECD, 2026^[117]). In addition, the Secretariat provides civil society-related inputs to DAC Peer Reviews and Mid-term Reviews, with inputs to 21 Peer Reviews having been provided since the DAC Recommendation annex was included in the peer-review methodology in 2022.

268. Fifteen Adherent Respondents find the DAC CoP on Civil Society to be a useful platform, both at policy and implementational level, for collectively addressing common challenges in implementing the DAC Recommendation. 7 find it to be important at policy level, but not at implementation level, 2 find it useful to some extent, and 1 Adherent Respondent finds it not noticeably useful (Figure 3.17). Adherent Respondents underscored the value of the DAC CoP on Civil Society as a space of knowledge sharing, networking and for peer learning through the sharing of good practices for tackling challenges in enabling civil society. Adherent Respondents also suggested that the CoP could benefit from extending its outreach beyond DAC members' headquarters by targeting their offices in partner countries from which important insights on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation could be gathered.

Figure 3.17. Extent to which Adherent Respondents find the DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society to be a useful platform for collectively addressing common challenges in implementing the DAC Recommendation



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “Do you find the DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society to be a useful platform to collectively address common challenges in implementing the DAC Recommendation?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

269. The Adherent questionnaire included questions on the usefulness of materials developed by the OECD Secretariat in supporting the implementation of the DAC Recommendation. On the OECD toolkit, *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries* (OECD, 2023^[9]), 15 Adherent Respondents found it somewhat useful, 8 found it very useful and 2 Adherent Respondents were not aware of this effort. On the *Shifting Power with Partners* toolkit (OECD, 2024^[10]), 17 Adherent Respondents found it somewhat useful, 6 found it very useful, 2 were not aware of it and 1 Adherent Respondent found it not useful. Finally, the latest OECD toolkit, *Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space* (OECD, 2025^[11]) was found somewhat useful by 14 Adherent Respondents and very useful by 9, while 2 Adherent Respondents were not aware of this effort and 1 Adherent Respondent found it not useful. Beyond toolkits, 15 Adherent Respondents found other materials developed by the OECD Secretariat (e.g. peer learning, workshops, dissemination tools such as visual guides, brochures, PowerPoints (PPTs), etc.) somewhat useful, while 7 Adherent Respondents found them very useful and 1 Adherent Respondent was unaware of these efforts.

270. Adherent Respondents commended the OECD Secretariat’s ongoing efforts to support Adherents in implementing the DAC Recommendation through guidance materials such as the toolkits, as well as the Secretariat’s role in facilitating dialogue between DAC members and CSOs under the Framework for Dialogue. In their questionnaire responses, Adherent Respondents called for continued sharing of good practice examples among DAC members, and greater emphasis on guidance for enabling civil society that focuses on political and socio-economic contexts, such as fragile and conflict-affected environments, or that dives more deeply into specific provisions of the DAC Recommendation.

Box 3.4. CSOs' perspectives on implementation support to the DAC Recommendation

Among CSO Respondents, the toolkits were generally seen as being very useful. Around half of CSO Respondents rated each toolkit as very useful, including 18 for the toolkit on *Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries*, 18 for the *Shifting Power with Partners* toolkit and 17 for the *Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space* toolkit (OECD, 2023^[9]; OECD, 2024^[10]; OECD, 2025^[11]). In consultation, CSOs stressed that in order to leverage the toolkits, these should be rolled out more systematically across Adherent institutions, beyond civil society focal points, such as through staff training, embassy guidance, practical checklists, peer-review questions, monitoring indicators and links to funding and risk-management systems.

CSO Respondents suggested that to better support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation, the OECD Secretariat could consider organising multistakeholder dialogues at the partner-country level to widen dissemination, as well as issuing guidance to support DAC members in implementing the DAC Recommendation in restrictive, fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Furthermore, CSO Respondents called for a continuation of discussions on the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of the DAC Recommendation, as well as the collecting and sharing of best practices.

CSOs have played an important role in supporting and promoting the implementation of the DAC Recommendation. In particular, the CSO RG established a dedicated Working Group with strong participation from both provider and partner-country CSOs. Since the DAC Recommendation's adoption, the Working Group has collaborated closely with the DAC CoP and the OECD Secretariat to advance its implementation. This has included contributing to the development of implementation tools, such as the toolkits, and participating in sharing lessons and good practices, including through CoP meetings and the OECD DAC CSDs.

During consultations for the present Report, CSOs stressed that implementation support and dissemination should target the actors who can operationalise the DAC Recommendation in concrete contexts, such as DAC member embassies, development co-operation offices, geographic and sectoral units, and finance and risk teams, as well as partner-country governments and both provider and partner-country CSO networks.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

4. Dissemination

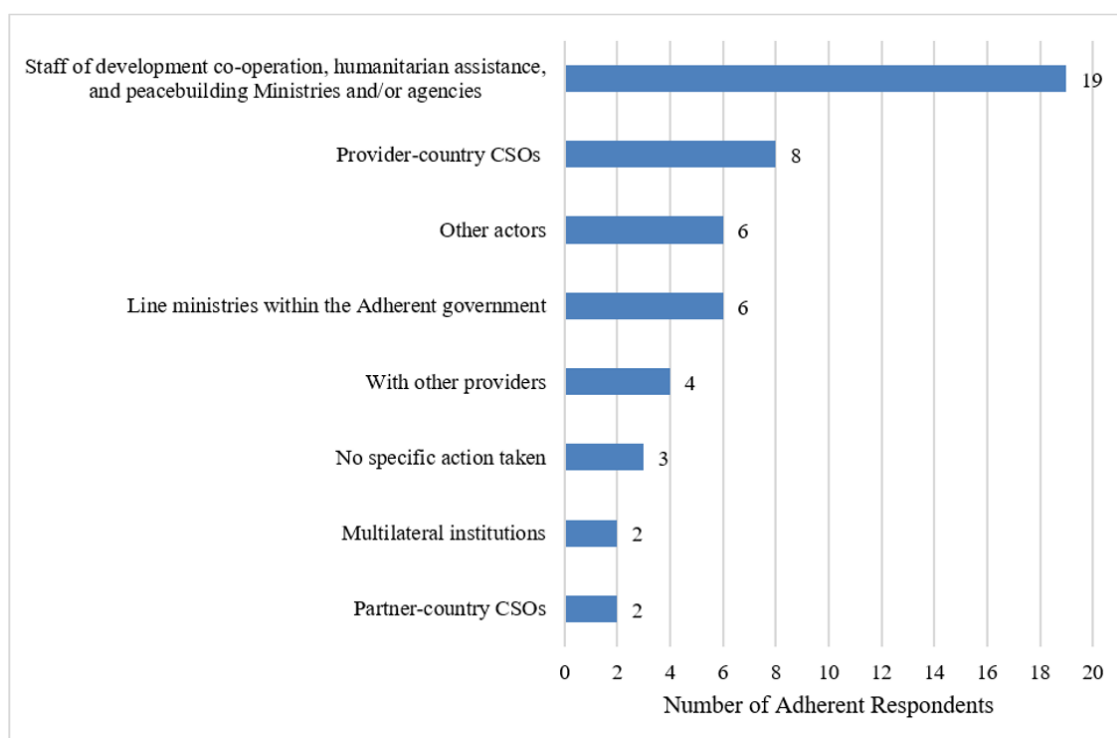
271. The DAC Recommendation invites the Secretary-General to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, as well as Adherents to disseminate it, particularly “throughout their development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding agencies and partners, and across government” [[OECD/LEGAL/5021](#)]. It moreover invites non-Adherents to take account of and adhere to the DAC Recommendation and encourages relevant non-government partners to disseminate and follow it.

4.1. Dissemination of the DAC Recommendation by Adherents

272. On measures taken to disseminate the DAC Recommendation, 19 Adherent Respondents reported having made dissemination efforts with staff from development co-

operation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding Ministries and/or agencies. Furthermore, 8 Adherent Respondents reported having made dissemination efforts with provider-country CSOs, 6 across line ministries within the Adherent government, 4 with other providers, 2 with partner-country CSOs and another 2 Adherent Respondents with multilateral institutions. Across Adherent Respondents, 3 reported having taken no specific action to disseminate the DAC Recommendation (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Measures taken by Adherent Respondents to disseminate the DAC Recommendation



Note: 25 Adherent Respondents to the question “What measures have you taken to disseminate the DAC Recommendation?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

273. Adherent Respondents reported having disseminated the DAC Recommendation through the development of internal webpages and the organisation of information sessions, presentations and workshops to raise internal awareness on the DAC Recommendation and the toolkits, often done in close collaboration with the OECD Secretariat. In addition, Adherent Respondents reported having organised public webinars, events and social media communications on the DAC Recommendation, as well as facilitating discussion sessions with external working groups with both domestic and partner-country audiences and involving a range of stakeholders, including CSOs.

274. Canada, for example, created a dedicated internal webpage through GAC that serves as a centralised information hub, organised an information session with GAC staff reaching at least 100 attendees, and shared information related to the toolkits through its social media channels. The EU and Sweden co-organised a seminar where the OECD Secretariat presented the DAC Recommendation to an audience that included both EU Member States and CSOs.

275. The SDC and Finland's MFA organised webinars and workshops with key stakeholders including CSOs and embassy staff to promote and disseminate the DAC Recommendation and toolkits. Italy, Portugal and Poland translated the DAC Recommendation into their native languages, sharing it with embassies and experts to ensure broader accessibility.

276. AICS developed an Action Plan to guide the implementation and dissemination of the DAC Recommendation and its related toolkits. This was complemented by a workshop in April 2025, organised with the OECD Secretariat, which brought together participants from AICS headquarters and partner-country-level offices, relevant line ministries, Italy's OECD delegation and the national development finance institution.

277. Adherent Respondents provided a range of suggestions to improve dissemination of the DAC Recommendation in future. These include targeting a wider range of actors such as partner countries, the private sector, non-DAC providers and multilaterals, and establishing dialogue platforms with a wider variety of development co-operation stakeholders to discuss the DAC Recommendation. Adherent Respondents also suggested reinforcing the role of CSOs as co-disseminators of the DAC Recommendation, notably by partnering with international and partner-country civil society networks to develop communication materials and awareness campaigns. Furthermore, Adherent Respondents recognised the need to emphasise dissemination and implementation support for DAC member staff in their partner-country-level offices.

Box 4.1. Dissemination of the DAC Recommendation by CSOs

Among CSOs responding to the CSO questionnaire, 25 had read the DAC Recommendation and/or a summary of its commitments, 10 were broadly aware of the DAC Recommendation and its purpose, while 3 had heard about it but had limited knowledge of its commitments and 3 were not aware of it. Several underscored not having extensive knowledge of its provisions and of related materials such as the toolkits. CSO Respondents with awareness of the DAC Recommendation highlighted that it has been used to guide their approaches to supporting and partnering with partner-country CSOs on civic space issues, as well as acting as a framework when delivering feedback and inputs to providers and institutions in consultation processes. CSOs also highlighted that awareness among DAC members is widespread within civil society units of ministries and agencies responsible for development co-operation, but that this awareness becomes weaker beyond these units and in other line ministries and agencies less directly involved in civil society partnerships and issues.

In reporting on measures they have taken or participated in related to the DAC Recommendation, 26 CSO Respondents reported having discussed the DAC Recommendation with other CSOs, 19 had participated in an event about the DAC Recommendation organised by the OECD, 15 had engaged in a consultation about the DAC Recommendation organised by other CSOs, 14 had discussed the DAC Recommendation with the OECD and 12 CSO Respondents had engaged in a consultation about the DAC Recommendation or related toolkits organised by the OECD Secretariat, among other various forms of consultation.

An example of a CSO-led dissemination initiative comes from Fingo, an umbrella organisation representing 250 Finnish CSOs, which organised a consultation session to align member and partner inputs to the CSO questionnaire. The session included an

OECD Secretariat presentation on the DAC Recommendation and the purpose of the implementation Report.

CSOs responding to the questionnaire provided varied suggestions to improve dissemination efforts around the DAC Recommendation. These included holding regular information sessions and integrating the DAC Recommendation into DAC-member staff trainings to ensure that awareness is sustained despite staff turnover, especially for partner-country-level offices. CSO Respondents also suggested developing less technical and more user-friendly dissemination materials on the DAC Recommendation, such as videos, articles, interviews and infographics, as well as developing issue-specific guidance notes on implementing the DAC Recommendation in response to particular civic space restrictions, such as digital repression, foreign-agent laws and AML/CFT overreach. Increasing engagement with CSO consortia was highlighted as a key area for improvement, with CSO Respondents underlining their role as multipliers in raising further awareness on the DAC Recommendation, especially among partner-country networks. Further suggestions included tying dissemination to real developments in civic space and civil society (i.e. when it is practically useful, such as around the adoption of a restrictive law), using the DAC Recommendation as a basis for joint messaging and advocacy by DAC members and CSOs. CSO Respondents recognised the value of linking the DAC Recommendation to regular monitoring, as is being done through this implementation Report and through the Peer Reviews, to strengthen follow-up on implementation by Adherents. Finally, CSO Respondents emphasised that future dissemination efforts should move beyond simply raising awareness of the DAC Recommendation and instead focus on supporting concrete actions by Adherents to implement its provisions, with particular attention to the specific challenges and realities faced by partner-country and grassroots CSOs, ensuring that implementation efforts are responsive to their needs and contexts.

Source: CSO questionnaire

4.2. Dissemination of the DAC Recommendation by the OECD Secretariat

278. The OECD Secretariat has taken steps to disseminate the DAC Recommendation through a variety of channels and engagements with diverse audiences. Through the CoP on Civil Society, the OECD Secretariat has effectively raised awareness and disseminated the DAC Recommendation among technical experts and civil society leads from DAC members' headquarters. Dissemination efforts and implementation support have been tailored to respond to the needs and priorities identified by CoP members (see Section 4.1).

279. To complement the toolkits and reach broader audiences, the OECD Secretariat has developed a range of dissemination materials, including PPT presentations, talking points, brochures and illustrated posters in multiple languages highlighting key messages and implementation guidance. The DAC Recommendation, associated toolkits, posters and related events are further promoted through the OECD Civil Society Newsletter, delivered monthly to more than 40,000 subscribers, which also features broader OECD work related to civil society. The recording of the aforementioned webinar on *Enabling Civil Society and Civic Space in a Changing Landscape* provides an additional, publicly accessible dissemination tool.

280. The OECD Secretariat has also leveraged international events with global audiences to promote the DAC Recommendation, often in collaboration with Adherents and CSOs. These include events led by CoP members, such as: a learning journey by the SDC on the DAC Recommendation (October 2021); a dialogue between Canada and CSOs to present and discuss the DAC Recommendation (June 2022); a seminar co-organised by

the EU, the Swedish delegation to the EU and Sida, with participation by EU DG INTPA staff and Swedish personnel and CSOs (June 2022); an event hosted by Ireland with CSOs, supported by the OECD Secretariat for awareness raising and stocktaking on the DAC Recommendation's implementation (February 2023); a workstream under the second Summit for Democracy focused on advancing dissemination and implementation of the DAC Recommendation, jointly led by Norway, Czechia and ICNL (March 2023); a webinar with the Italian MFA and AICS on the DAC Recommendation and its toolkits (April 2025); and a workshop with Lithuania under the EU-funded Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project (July 2025).

281. Other dissemination events have taken place through international and regional platforms, including: the Open Government Partnership Summit, featuring a dedicated session on the DAC Recommendation (December 2021); an inter-mechanism meeting with UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of HRDs and environmental rights defenders, among other mandate-holders (October 2024); and a presentation at the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness webinar as part of the GPEDC fourth monitoring round (May 2025). Dissemination has also been prominent in CSO-led initiatives, such as: the Participatory Research in Asia symposium (PRIA) (November 2021); a presentation in the International Civic Forum (ICF) organised by the International Civil Society Centre (October 2024); a webinar for the Affinity Group of National Associations/CIVICUS Global Accountability Month (October 2025); a presentation at the International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) Global Perspectives conference (November 2025); and a presentation with Fingo (November 2025).

282. Finally, in line with the DAC Recommendation, the OECD Secretariat has sought to expand adherence beyond DAC members with the support of the CoP on Civil Society. To that end, the OECD Secretariat has developed dissemination materials (e.g. flyers, PPT slides and tailored key messages) and mapped potential countries for adherence, in particular non-DAC OECD Members, non-OECD Members – including those in the process of joining the DAC and OECD accession candidate countries – and other international organisations. While expanded adherence has not yet been achieved despite these efforts, Adherent Respondents emphasised the importance of further engagement with diverse development co-operation providers. Accordingly, further efforts could be put into disseminating the provisions of the DAC Recommendation and promoting alignment of non-Adherents with it, with a view to potentially inviting formal adherence to the DAC Recommendation in the future.

283. In light of the ever-evolving development co-operation landscape and informed by priorities identified in the ongoing DAC Review process, CoP members have also expressed growing interest in engaging with non-DAC providers and philanthropic actors with the aim of sharing approaches and lessons. Such actors can play a key role in its success and reach.

5. Summary and Conclusions

284. Five years since the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, Adherents have made real advances, in both policy and practice, towards enabling civil society. Across the three Pillars, implementation since 2021 shows a widespread adoption of strategies and standards, expanded mechanisms for dialogue and participation and improvements in funding approaches, as well as growing attention to capacity strengthening and accountability standards. These efforts have helped embed civil society and civic space considerations more systematically within development co-operation systems.

285. At the same time, significant challenges continue to constrain effective implementation. A persistent and significant gap remains between policy commitments and implementation and is at risk of growing. This gap is driven in part by declining ODA, shifting political priorities and an increasingly restrictive global environment for civil society and growing pressures on civic space. Financial pressures are affecting the predictability, flexibility and accessibility of funding, while structural barriers, such as administrative burdens, risk-averse practices and unequal partnerships, continue to limit the meaningful participation of partner-country and smaller CSOs. Across all Pillars, progress is also uneven, with risks of reversals in funding quantity and quality, and participation in and support for CSO accountability.

286. In this evolving development landscape, both Adherent and CSO Respondents agreed that the DAC Recommendation continues to serve as a key guiding framework and reference point for strengthening policies and practices in support of civil society. Respondents offered suggestions to enhance its implementation and dissemination in the coming years and reaffirmed its continued relevance. Several noted that current challenges make the DAC Recommendation even more critical today.

287. The following sections provide a summary of the current state of play in relation to implementation and dissemination of the DAC Recommendation, drawing on findings from Adherents' and CSOs' responses to the questionnaires and consultations, and identifies priority areas for further action, both for Adherents and the DAC, supported by the OECD Secretariat.

5.1. Implementation

Pillar 1: Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space

288. Implementation of Pillar 1 shows strong frameworks and sustained commitments across Adherent Respondents, with significant progress in policy adoption and development since 2021. All Adherents responding to the questionnaire have adopted or maintained policy positions recognising the value of civil society and the importance of civic space. These positions are reflected across a range of policy instruments, most commonly strategies, policies, funding instruments, dialogue mechanisms and guidelines, which have helped anchor the protection of civic space and the support for civil society within development co-operation agendas. Engagement in dialogue with partner-country governments and public awareness raising has generally been maintained or increased, supported by a range of communication tools and partnerships, including with civil society itself. Many explicitly emphasise engagement with marginalised groups and call for greater involvement of partner-country civil society actors. These frameworks have also contributed to increased engagement with civil society in both policy and programme development and in some cases to the institutionalisation of consultation mechanisms. Alongside this, Adherent Respondents have also made progress in maintaining or moderately strengthening co-ordination through multilateral and regional platforms and in reinforcing the application of the “do no harm” principle through more systematic use of risk assessments, context analyses and internal guidance. Supporting participation in public policy processes, including in the digital sphere and through engagement with independent media, further illustrates areas of reported progress in implementation.

289. However, a widening gap persists between policy commitments and effective implementation, and operational and political constraints are increasingly shaping outcomes. Recent ODA cuts and shifting political priorities have reduced funding for civil society and civic space programming, limiting providers' ability to deliver on established policy frameworks. These cuts have also led to the scaling down or closure of key co-

ordination mechanisms, weakening joint programming, funding and learning efforts among providers, and in many contexts, reinforcing a shift towards more reactive rather than preventive approaches. At the same time, CSO-led monitoring evidence has highlighted how the enabling environment for civil society has deteriorated significantly in recent years, with increasing restrictions observed in both provider and partner countries, including foreign-agent laws, digital surveillance and disinformation campaigns. Despite some progress, responses to mis- and disinformation and digital repression remain underdeveloped and insufficiently co-ordinated. These trends translate into tangible operational challenges for CSOs, including diversion of limited resources to compliance and legal defence, greater exposure to security risks and reduced access to international funding. For providers, this creates complex trade-offs in supporting civil society in contexts of shrinking civic space while upholding the “do no harm” principle. While Adherent Respondents are adapting, through lower-profile support, engagement in less sensitive thematic programmes, or quiet diplomacy, in the most restrictive contexts this has sometimes resulted in a scaling back of funding rather than genuine context-specific adaptation. Dialogue with partner-country governments remains inconsistent and shrinking civic space in some provider countries also risks undermining credibility and policy coherence in external engagement.

Box 5.1. Summary of CSO perspectives on the implementation of Pillar 1

Perspectives from CSOs broadly confirm these findings while highlighting additional concerns regarding sustainability and effectiveness. CSOs acknowledge progress in policy development and the mainstreaming of civic space since the DAC Recommendation, including better recognition of marginalised groups and an integration of civic space considerations into programming. However, they emphasise that shrinking civic space is not a passive trend, but the result of State actions – in provider and partner countries – including restrictive legislation, securitisation, digital and transnational repression. They underscore that declining and less predictable funding, linked to ODA reductions and shifting priorities, is having significant impacts on CSOs’ operational capacity and continuity, particularly for local and smaller organisations. CSOs also report that providers are facing challenges in effectively engaging with partner-country governments, tend to rely on reactive rather than preventive approaches to defending civic space, and insufficiently integrate and use civil society-generated data for early warning and response. While some initiatives targeting mis- and disinformation and digital threats exist, these remain fragmented and under-resourced. At the same time, CSOs stress that providers have clear agency to respond more proactively, including through leveraging early-warning systems, conditioning support on enabling environments, and embedding civic space considerations consistently across all areas of engagement.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

290. Looking ahead, further action is required to ensure more effective, coherent and forward-looking implementation to protect and promote civic space. This includes strengthening the narrative on the strategic value of civil society and civic space, including in diplomatic engagement with partner countries and GCE efforts to counter mis- and disinformation, polarisation and declining public trust in civil society in both partner and provider-country contexts. Several Adherent Respondents also emphasised the importance of partnering more systematically with civil society, across both provider and partner

countries, to raise awareness and rebuild trust. At the same time, reduced funding for civic space and civil society programming reinforces the need to apply the “do no harm” principle. Further efforts are required to expand engagement with a broader range of actors, including non-DAC providers, development banks, philanthropic organisations and the private sector, to better integrate enabling-environment considerations across development co-operation and investment frameworks, while addressing the currently limited and insufficiently institutionalised role of the private sector and the uneven support to partner-country accountability institutions. In the context of scaled-down co-ordination mechanisms due to funding constraints, there is a need to reinforce provider co-ordination and joint programming and funding, particularly to address digital threats through initiatives such as digital safety, media literacy and fact checking, and to address mis- and disinformation including that which targets civil society. Overall, strengthening implementation will require increased and sustained resourcing, broader and more inclusive partnerships and more coherent proactive and preventive actions, including greater use of early warning systems and enhanced co-ordination to adopt context-specific responses in increasingly restrictive environments.

Pillar 2: Supporting and engaging with civil society

291. Implementation of Pillar 2 demonstrates important progress across several provisions, even as recent funding pressures begin to affect gains made since 2021. A majority of Adherent Respondents have established or maintained policies and strategies for engaging with civil society, most of which are developed in consultation with CSOs and integrated into broader development, humanitarian and peacebuilding frameworks. There has also been a general increase in efforts to promote civil society participation across policy and programme cycles, with a gradual shift by some Adherents towards more structured and institutionalised engagement. Adherent Respondents have also strengthened alignment with international standards, particularly on the HDP Nexus and SEAH prevention, supported by dedicated policies and multistakeholder mechanisms. Improvements have also been observed in funding modalities, including the expansion by some Adherents of multi-year partnerships and more flexible funding approaches, alongside initiatives to streamline administrative processes and enhance transparency.

292. Despite these advances, implementation remains uneven and is increasingly constrained by financial and structural challenges. While many Adherent Respondents have maintained or increased support to civil society, progress in advancing LLD has been more limited in practice, with insufficient availability of direct, predictable and flexible funding to partner-country CSOs and continued reliance on intermediaries. Declining ODA has had a disproportionate impact on sectors such as human rights, democracy and civic space, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where support is most needed. These reductions are already translating into significant operational consequences, with some CSOs scaling down or closing altogether. In addition, policy frameworks do not systematically incorporate context-sensitive approaches, particularly in fragile and restrictive environments. Efforts to reduce administrative burdens, though progressing, have not fully addressed the disproportionate challenges faced by smaller and partner-country CSOs. Similarly, while participation mechanisms have expanded, they are not yet consistently institutionalised or inclusive. Overall, there is a growing risk that progress made since 2021 on improving funding modalities may be reversed, with a return to shorter-term, more rigid and project-based approaches aligned to immediate provider priorities.

Box 5.2. Summary of CSO perspectives on the implementation of Pillar 2

CSO perspectives broadly acknowledge some progress made but continue to highlight persistent structural shortcomings. While recognising increased opportunities for engagement and support for CSO platforms and networks, CSOs stress that participation often remains ad hoc, insufficiently influential, and more accessible to international and provider-country CSOs than to grassroots and partner-country CSOs. Structural barriers including limited resources, language constraints and unequal access to information, continue to restrict inclusive engagement. Weak feedback loops and limited evidence of CSO input influencing decision making further contribute to concerns about the quality of engagement. At the same time, funding remains predominantly short-term and project-based and earmarked to provider priorities with limited core and flexible support, undermining sustainability and local leadership. CSOs therefore call for stronger efforts to protect and resource civil society as a public good, more equitable risk-sharing models, rethinking the role of intermediaries and strengthened investment in civil society ecosystem infrastructure and diverse civil society actors. Finally, CSOs stressed that the “do no harm” principle should extend to funding decisions, with early communication, consultation and co-ordination among providers being essential to mitigating the harm caused by sudden funding withdrawals or portfolio shifts.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

293. Looking ahead, further action is required to safeguard progress and address emerging risks. This includes maintaining and, where possible increasing, both the quantity and quality of funding for civil society, particularly through flexible, multi-year and core support, and by expanding direct funding to partner-country CSOs to advance LLD. In the context of declining ODA, there is an urgent need to protect gains made since 2021 on funding quality and avoid a systemic shift back towards short-term, project-based and earmarked financing, as already evidenced by the closure of some pooled funding mechanisms and reduced availability of multi-year support. Adherents should intensify efforts to simplify and harmonise administrative requirements and adopt more proportionate and equitable approaches to risk sharing. Participation should be institutionalised as a core standard, moving towards co-creation and shared decision making, and supported by adequate resourcing to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. Greater investment in GCE will also be essential to counter declining trust and reinforce the role of civil society. Finally, broadening partnerships, including with non-DAC actors, development banks, philanthropic organisations and the private sector, and fostering innovative financing approaches will be critical to ensure resilient and effective support to civil society in a rapidly evolving funding landscape.

Pillar 3: Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability

294. Progress has been made across several dimensions of Pillar 3. Adherent Respondents have broadly maintained or strengthened efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability, notably through the institutionalisation of standards and support mechanisms. This includes the application of codes of conduct, contractual requirements and safeguards related to human rights, gender equality and the prevention of SEAH. Many Adherent Respondents have moderately or significantly increased efforts to support mutual capacity strengthening, including through dedicated funding, long-term partnerships, peer learning and consortium-based approaches. Several Adherent Respondents have also introduced requirements for partner-country CSO participation in consortia and taken steps to streamline reporting and administrative

processes. In parallel, efforts to promote participatory and rights-based approaches, and strengthen CSO co-ordination and support for innovation have expanded, alongside engagement with CSO networks and platforms as intermediaries to foster accountability and learning.

295. However, implementation remains uneven and constrained by persistent structural challenges. CSO co-ordination with all levels of government in partner countries receives little attention. Accountability is largely compliance-driven, and recognition and support for CSO-led accountability frameworks remains limited or inconsistent. Capacity strengthening tends not to be mutual or reciprocal and is often designed around providers' own reporting and oversight needs rather than focusing on CSOs' priorities. Smaller and partner-country CSOs continue to face significant difficulties in meeting accountability and reporting requirements, as providers often treat accountability and learning functions as overhead costs rather than core programme components, limiting CSOs' ability to invest in necessary systems. There is a continued tendency towards risk-averse approaches among providers, favouring established organisations with proven track records, an approach that may be reinforced by ongoing budget cuts. Although efforts have been made to simplify administrative processes and promote equitable partnerships, structural imbalances linked to funding modalities, compliance requirements and capacity gaps persist, and continue to limit the meaningful participation of partner-country CSOs as equal partners. Such strict compliance requirements and risk-averse approaches often constrain flexibility and innovation, while participatory and rights-based approaches are not yet consistently embedded across all programmes. Furthermore, efforts related to CSO effectiveness and accountability should have a greater focus on their accountability to affected populations.

Box 5.3. Summary of CSO perspectives on the implementation of Pillar 3

CSOs acknowledge some progress has been made but underscore significant constraints. They recognise increased support for capacity strengthening, peer learning and partnership-based approaches, including initiatives targeting smaller and partner-country actors. However, they emphasise that rigid audit, reporting and compliance requirements continue to disproportionately burden these organisations, limiting their ability to invest in their own effectiveness and accountability systems. CSOs further noted that there is insufficient recognition of CSO-led accountability standards as valid evidence of accountability, stressing this as a key area of opportunity going forward. CSOs highlight that short-term, project-based funding and rigid budgets undermine long-term capacity building, staff retention and the development of robust internal systems. CSOs also note that risk-averse administrative cultures limit flexibility and innovation, and that accountability requirements can sometimes shift focus away from programme delivery. In restrictive environments, they further caution that transparency and accountability standards may expose organisations to political or security risks, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive approaches.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

296. Looking ahead, addressing these gaps will require more deliberate and systematic action. Priority areas include expanding access to flexible, multi-year, core and/or programme-based funding to enable CSOs to invest in institutional capacity, learning and accountability as integral components of their work. Adherents should adopt more proportionate, flexible and context-sensitive approaches to compliance and risk management, including clearer articulation of acceptable risk thresholds and more equitable risk sharing. Greater recognition of and support for CSO-led accountability

frameworks is needed, alongside efforts to ensure that capacity strengthening is inclusive and reaches smaller and local actors. Advancing equitable partnerships will require reforms to funding modalities, administrative processes and organisational practices, including a rethinking of the roles of intermediaries, and stronger incentives for direct and balanced partnerships. In the context of budget constraints, it will be essential to safeguard and, where possible, scale up existing capacity-strengthening and funding innovations. Finally, increased harmonisation of due diligence requirements and strengthened dialogue and co-learning among providers and CSOs will be critical to promoting more effective, transparent and accountable civil society engagement.

Support to the implementation of the DAC Recommendation

297. Implementation support for the DAC Recommendation has been successful in several key areas. The OECD Secretariat has taken a structured and responsive approach, starting with early prioritisation exercises and regularly updating these through surveys and engagement with the CoP on Civil Society and the CSO RG. A major strength has been the development of practical toolkits, which translate the DAC Recommendation into actionable guidance. These resources, co-created through peer-learning and inclusive consultation processes, are widely regarded as very useful by Adherents and CSOs. In addition, platforms such as the biennial OECD DAC CSDs, targeted workshops, webinars and country-specific support have fostered dialogue, shared learning and helped adapt implementation to different contexts. The CoP itself is particularly valued as a hub for peer exchange and problem solving.

298. Another positive aspect has been the OECD Secretariat's horizontal approach. The integration of the DAC Recommendation across OECD policy work has contributed to increasing awareness and ensuring coherence in OECD work around civil society. Continuous knowledge sharing, analytical work and tailored support have strengthened awareness and uptake. However, feedback suggests that outreach could be expanded, especially beyond DAC members' headquarters to partner-country-level staff, and that more context-specific guidance would further enhance implementation.

299. Looking ahead, several forward-looking priorities for implementation support emerge from questionnaire responses and consultations with both Adherents and CSOs. A strong and consistent message is the importance of continuing to learn from one another, with the CoP on Civil Society seen as a central space for lesson learning, mutual accountability, support and the sharing of good practices. Reinforcing this function of the CoP will therefore be critical. The broader, multistakeholder engagement on themes related to enabling civil society as provided by the OECD DAC CSDs will also provide important opportunities for collective lessons on sharing and problem solving. In addition, there is a clear demand for targeted, practical and context-sensitive guidance, particularly through concise toolkits and/or policy briefs addressing specific themes of the DAC Recommendation. These may include topics such as engagement with informal civil society and social movements, supporting civil society actors in restrictive environments, harmonisation of due diligence requirements and CSO accountability, amongst others. The prioritisation of future toolkits and/or policy briefs will be guided by ongoing consultations with the CoP and with input from the CSO RG. In addition, Adherents and CSO Respondents emphasise the need to broaden engagement beyond DAC members, including with non-DAC providers, partner countries, multilateral organisations, philanthropy, private sector and other relevant actors. At the same time, there is a strong call to deepen collaboration with civil society itself, especially by strengthening engagement with actors from the Global South. Finally, a recurring priority is to maintain flexibility in the OECD

Secretariat's approach, ensuring that implementation support remains demand-driven, responsive and adaptable to evolving needs.

5.2. Dissemination

300. Progress has been made in disseminating the DAC Recommendation, particularly within Adherents' headquarters. A majority of Adherent Respondents have undertaken dissemination efforts targeting staff within development co-operation, humanitarian and peacebuilding agencies, primarily through internal webpages, workshops, training sessions and awareness-raising events. Some have also engaged external audiences through public webinars, consultations and social media communications, often in collaboration with the OECD Secretariat. The Secretariat has played a central role in supporting dissemination through the CoP on Civil Society, the development of communication materials in multiple languages, regular outreach via newsletters and engagement in international events. Collectively, these efforts have contributed to broad awareness of the DAC Recommendation among technical experts and civil society focal points in DAC member countries, positioning it as a useful reference framework in policy dialogue and programming.

301. However, dissemination efforts remain uneven and limited in scope. While awareness is relatively strong within civil society units and among DAC members' headquarter-based staff, it weakens across other parts of government, including line ministries and field-level offices. Outreach to external stakeholders, particularly partner-country CSOs, non-DAC providers and multilateral institutions, has been comparatively limited. Similarly, only a minority of Adherent Respondents have actively engaged partner-country audiences, and efforts to expand adherence beyond DAC members have so far yielded limited results. Dissemination has also relied on one-off events and internal channels, with less emphasis on sustained engagement, practical implementation support and integration into operational guidance and training systems.

Box 5.4. Summary of CSO perspectives on dissemination of the DAC Recommendation

CSOs report moderate awareness but highlight important gaps in dissemination and accessibility. While a majority of CSOs responding to the CSO questionnaire or participating in the consultations are familiar with the DAC Recommendation, many indicate only partial knowledge of its provisions and associated tools. Awareness is strongest among provider-country CSO networks and organisations already engaged in OECD processes, and significantly weaker among partner-country and grassroots CSOs. CSOs emphasise that dissemination materials are often too technical and not sufficiently adapted to diverse audiences. They also stress the importance of leveraging CSO networks as multipliers, increasing engagement at country level and linking dissemination to practical implementation support. At the same time, CSOs value the DAC Recommendation and its associated toolkits as useful reference frameworks and call for stronger links between dissemination, implementation, monitoring and policy dialogue. Finally, CSO Respondents underline that dissemination efforts should move beyond simply raising awareness of the DAC Recommendation and instead focus on supporting concrete actions by Adherents to implement its provisions.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

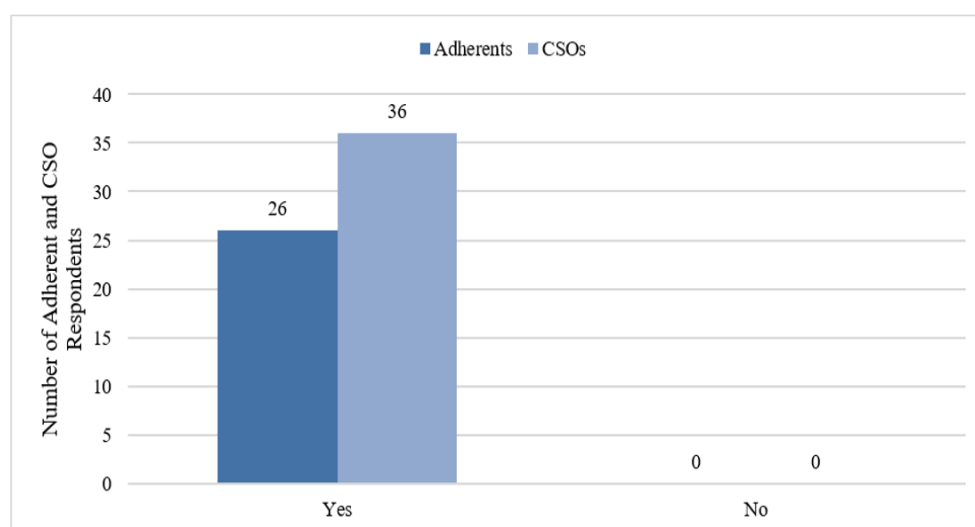
302. Further action is needed by both Adherents and the OECD Secretariat to strengthen dissemination and uptake. Adherents should expand dissemination beyond headquarters, with a particular focus on reaching field-level staff, country offices, partner-country governments and a broader range of line ministries. Greater and more systematic engagement with external partners, including partner-country CSOs, non-DAC providers, multilateral organisations, private sector and philanthropy will be essential. Both Adherents and the OECD Secretariat should better leverage CSOs, particularly partner-country networks, as co-disseminators and multipliers. Dissemination should increasingly rely on accessible, user-friendly materials (e.g. summaries, visuals, translations and short briefing notes) and be integrated into DAC members' staff training, operational guidance and programme-design processes.

303. The OECD Secretariat will further broaden its engagement strategy to deepen awareness and uptake across diverse institutional and geographic contexts, including through country-level and multistakeholder events, targeted guidance for specific settings (such as fragile and restrictive environments), and the publication of communication materials. Finally, greater efforts should be made to seize opportunities for dissemination in international, regional and national fora, while expanding outreach to new audiences such as the private sector, sub-national governments and youth, and strengthening linkages between dissemination, implementation support and peer learning.

5.3. Continued relevance

304. All 26 Adherents who responded to the question on continued relevance reported that the DAC Recommendation continues to be highly relevant in the context of civil society policy and practice in their jurisdiction (Figure 5.1). Adherent Respondents argued that amid shrinking civic space across provider and partner countries and the parallel decline in ODA, the DAC Recommendation is more relevant now than ever. This is consistent with discussions held during the OECD DAC CSDs held in June 2025 and the webinar on Enabling Civil Society and Civic Space in a Changing Landscape held in February 2026, where participants emphasised the DAC Recommendation as being highly relevant in the context of increasing pressures on civic space and evolving development co-operation priorities (OECD, 2025^[197]; OECD, 2025^[80]).

Figure 5.1. Extent to which Adherent and CSO Respondents consider the topics covered by the DAC Recommendation continue to be relevant to civil society policy and practice

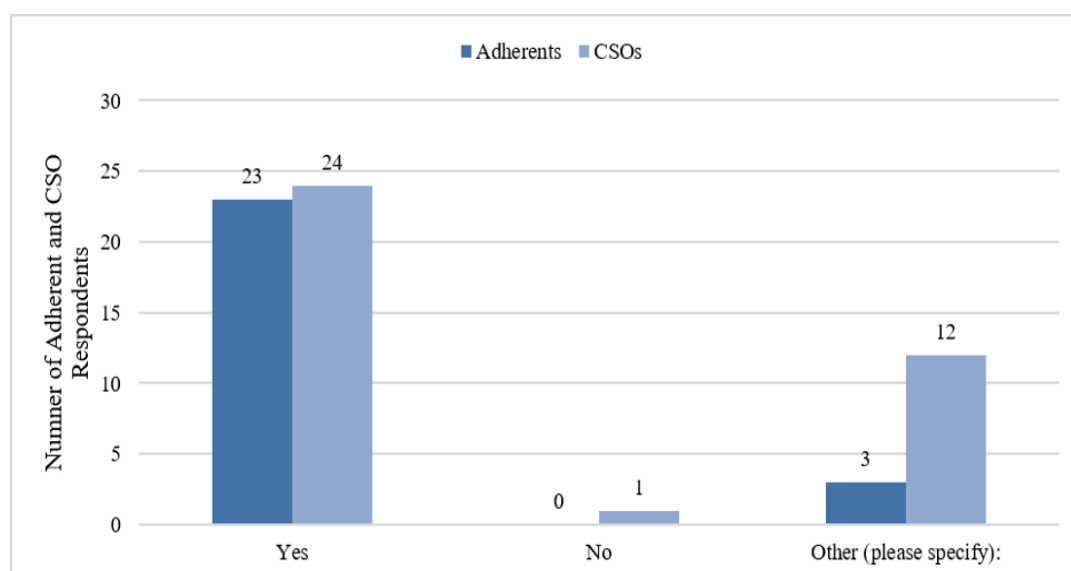


Note: 26 Adherent Respondents and 37 CSO Respondents to the question “Overall, would you say the topics covered by the DAC Recommendation continue to be relevant in the context of civil society policy and practice in your jurisdiction/in the context in which you operate?”.

Source: Adherent questionnaire; CSO questionnaire.

305. 23 Adherent Respondents reported that the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose, while 3 selected “other”. Adherent Respondents stressed that the DAC Recommendation acts as valuable framework and sets a good standard for improving strategies, policies and support modalities to enable civil society (Figure 5.2). They also underscored that it provides an entry point around which providers and civil society actors come together to discuss such issues, and that it acts as a useful tool to progress on LLD. Among Adherent Respondents that selected “other”, some argued that the DAC Recommendation would better serve its purpose, and be better anchored within policies and programming, if it were better and more broadly understood by DAC-member institutions and if there were greater awareness across line ministries.

Figure 5.2. Extent to which Adherents and CSO Respondents feel the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose

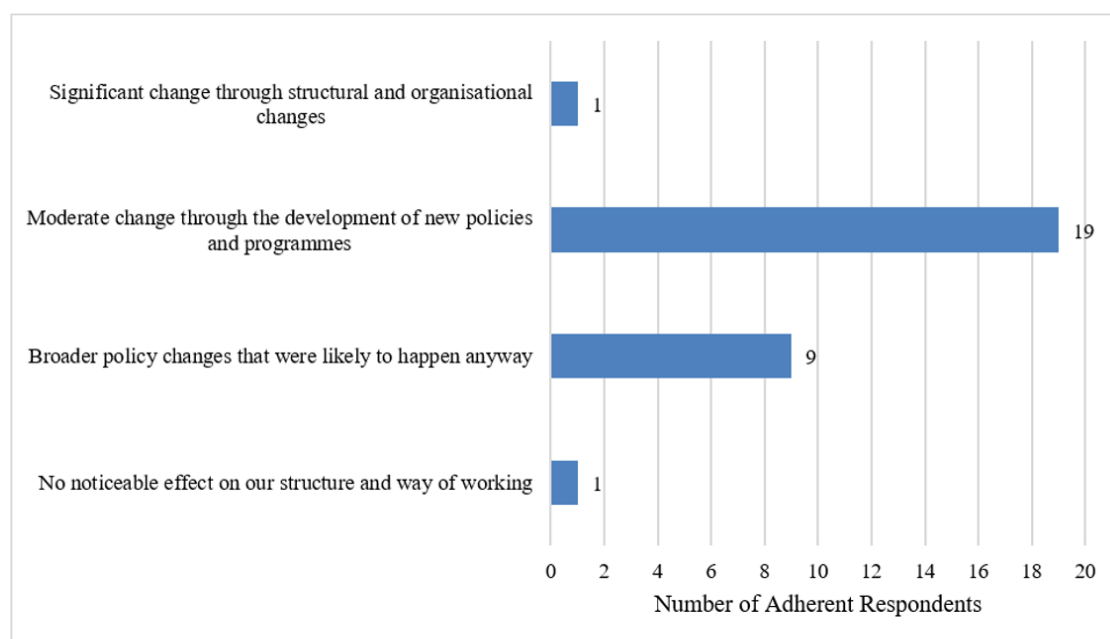


Note: 26 Adherent Respondents and 37 CSO Respondents to the question “Do you feel that the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose?”.

Source: Adherent questionnaire; CSO questionnaire.

306. Nineteen Adherent Respondents have made moderate changes to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the provisions of the DAC Recommendation through the development of new policies and programmes. Nine reported having made broader policy changes that were likely to happen anyway, and 1 Adherent Respondent reported having made significant changes through structural and organisational changes, while another Adherent Respondent reported no noticeable effect on their structure and ways of working (Figure 5.3). Adherent Respondents highlighted having referenced the DAC Recommendation and reflected its provisions in the development of national strategies, policies, programmes and funding guidelines on development co-operation and civil society engagement. Some respondents reported having specifically cited the toolkits to inform policy notes, while others reported that the DAC Recommendation was used to validate and make the case for developing internal policy that is favourable towards civil society.

Figure 5.3. Extent to which Adherent Respondents have changed their policies and practices to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the provisions of the DAC Recommendation since 2021



Note: 27 Adherent Respondents to the question “Overall, have you changed your policies and practices to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the provisions of the DAC Recommendation?”. As respondents could select more than one response option, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents.

Source: Adherent questionnaire.

307. However, Adherent Respondents argued that the DAC Recommendation could be strengthened by identifying key areas within each Pillar that Adherents should prioritise in implementation, to ensure that ambitions in implementation are reflective of budget constraints and current shifts in the development co-operation landscape. Adherent Respondents also called for greater guidance on how Adherents can apply the provisions of the DAC Recommendation in varied political and socio-economic contexts, such as high-risk, fragile and conflict-affected environments, or on specific provisions of the DAC Recommendation. Adherent Respondents also suggested that the Secretariat could support efforts to make the case for civic space by bolstering evidence on the value of enabled civil society to economic and development outcomes, which is currently being pursued by the Secretariat through the drafting of a policy brief. Furthermore, to increase awareness and advance implementation of the DAC Recommendation at the partner-country level, Adherent Respondents highlighted the need for greater engagement of Adherents with partner-country governments and CSOs.

Box 5.5. CSOs' perspectives on the continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation

All 36 CSOs who responded to the question on continued relevance reported that the topics covered by the DAC Recommendation continue to be relevant for civil society policy and practice, in the contexts in which they operate (Figure 5.1). In fact, CSO Respondents argued that the DAC Recommendation is more relevant than ever in the face of growing restrictions on civic space and the decreasing availability of funding for civil society. In this context, CSOs highlighted the important role that the DAC Recommendation can play in strengthening the narrative surrounding civil society as independent and valuable development actors in their own right.

Twenty-four CSO Respondents feel the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose, 12 selected the option "other", and 1 CSO Respondent reported that it does not serve its purpose (Figure 5.2). CSO Respondents stressed that the DAC Recommendation and its provisions are highly valuable for setting standards on enabling civil society, and that it is more relevant than ever considering the ongoing developments in shrinking civic space. However, several recognised that it does not reflect current budgetary priorities and that its implementation is limited amidst DAC members' budgetary and capacity constraints. Furthermore, CSO Respondents argued that it can be challenging to assess the influence and impact of the DAC Recommendation, despite the value of DAC Peer Reviews and products such as the present Report in assessing its implementation.

Twenty CSO Respondents reported that DAC-member institutions have made moderate changes through the development of new policies and programmes to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the DAC Recommendation, such as through the introduction of new policies, expansion of programmes, increased access to financial support or enhanced engagement with civil society actors. Fourteen CSO Respondents reported no noticeable effect on DAC-member institutions' structures and ways of working, 5 reported broader policy changes that were likely to happen anyway, and 1 CSO Respondent reported significant structural and organisational changes. CSO Respondents reported some improvements in DAC members' approaches to LLD, civil society strategies, consultation processes and opportunities for participation for CSOs. However, they also noted that, since the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, there have been limited changes among DAC members on provisions that would require wider institutional reforms, such as shifts in funding modalities, compliance requirements and risk-sharing approaches.

CSO Respondents argued that the DAC Recommendation could be strengthened by increasing dissemination and awareness building among a broader range of CSOs and CSO networks, especially at the partner-country level. Furthermore, implementation support could better target themes that are increasingly relevant and timely such as digital repression, core and programmatic support to advance LLD, risk sharing and engagement with civil society in restrictive and fragile contexts, and the harmonisation of due diligence requirements.

Source: CSO questionnaire; consultations.

5.4. Next steps

308. In light of the above, in order to further support implementation and dissemination of the DAC Recommendation, Adherents should prioritise a more strategic and focused approach to implementing the DAC Recommendation, focusing on the key priority areas

within each Pillar as identified in this Report, ensuring that resources are used where they are most needed. This includes strengthening dissemination and uptake beyond headquarters by systematically engaging DAC members' partner-country-level staff, partner-country governments and CSOs, and a wider range of DAC members' line ministries. Adherents should also deepen collaboration with external actors, including non-DAC providers, multilateral organisations, philanthropy and the private sector, including engagement with partner-country governments where possible. In parallel, there is a need to embed the DAC Recommendation more firmly in operational practice through staff training, programme design and internal guidance, while collaborating more with CSOs, particularly partner-country CSO networks, as partners in implementation and dissemination. Finally, Adherents should actively seek practical guidance on applying the DAC Recommendation in diverse and complex contexts, including fragile and restrictive environments.

309. The DAC and the OECD Secretariat will continue to support Adherents in advancing implementation by ensuring that support remains demand-driven, flexible and responsive to evolving needs. This includes continuing to strengthen the evidence base on the value of civil society and open civic space, and developing targeted, practical and context-sensitive guidance; for example, concise toolkits and/or policy briefs on priority themes such as engagement with informal civil society and social movements, supporting civil society actors in restrictive environments, harmonisation of due diligence requirements and CSO accountability, amongst others. The DAC and the OECD Secretariat will also work with CoP members to scale up partner-country-level and multistakeholder engagement including through the biennial OECD DAC CSDs, support dissemination through accessible and user-friendly communication materials, and actively promote the DAC Recommendation across international, regional and national fora. Expanding outreach beyond DAC members to include non-DAC providers and other development actors will be critical to increasing alignment and impact. At the same time, the OECD Secretariat will endeavour to strengthen linkages between dissemination, implementation support and peer learning.

310. The CoP on Civil Society will remain central as the primary platform for mutual learning, peer exchange and practical implementation support. Going forward, its role should be reinforced to facilitate more systematic sharing of lessons learned, good practices and partner-country-level experiences, while helping to prioritise emerging areas for guidance. The CoP can also continue to serve as a key vehicle for co-creation, bringing together Adherents, CSOs and other stakeholders to work together in developing tools, disseminating knowledge and fostering collaboration, particularly with actors from the Global South. Strengthening the CoP's function as a hub for continuous engagement, including through tailored resources, thematic discussions and learning events, will be essential to sustain momentum, advance implementation and ensure that the DAC Recommendation remains relevant and actionable across diverse contexts.

311. It is proposed that the DAC develops a second report on the implementation, dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation in five years.

Annex B. Questionnaire responses of Adherents and CSOs

1. Responses to the questionnaires from Adherents and CSOs

1. The Adherent and CSO questionnaires were structured in three sections:
 - Section A covers implementation of the substantive provisions of the DAC Recommendation, organised under the three Pillars;
 - Section B covers the dissemination and continued relevance of the DAC Recommendation; and
 - Section C covers recent developments and priorities for the future.
2. The questionnaires combined multiple-choice and open-ended questions. All multiple-choice questions allowed respondents to select more than one response option. Therefore, in some cases, the total number of responses shown exceeds the number of respondents. Respondents were free to answer only the questions they wished to, so the total number of respondents for each question varies; this number is shown as N below each question in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2.
3. The responses for Adherents (Table 1.1) and for CSOs (Table 1.2) are presented in aggregate, in line with OECD Personal Data Protection Rules.

1.1. Questionnaire responses from Adherents

4. Responses to the Adherent questionnaire were gathered between September and November 2025, with a total of 27 Adherents (hereafter “Adherent Respondents”) submitting their questionnaire response (see Table 2.1 in Section 2. Methodology, for an overview of responding Adherents). Respondents could select more than one response option for any multiple-choice question. As a result, the total number of responses to a question may in some cases exceed the total number of respondents to that question (shown as N).

Table 1.1. Questionnaire responses from Adherents

Response option	Number of Responses	Percentage of Adherent Respondents
SECTION A. IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBSTANTIVE PROVISIONS OF THE DAC RECOMMENDATION		
Pillar 1. Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space		
Q1. Have you developed policy positions on civil society and/or on civic space (e.g. policy documents, strategies, or legislation)? (See Pillar 1, provision II.1)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Yes, on civil society	21	78%
Yes, on civic space	14	52%
Maintained existing policy positions already in place	12	44%
No policy position has been taken	0	0%
Q2. How has your dialogue with partner country governments on civil society and civic space changed? (See Pillar 1, provision II.2)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significantly increased dialogue	1	4%

Moderately increased dialogue	12	44%
Maintained existing levels of dialogue	13	48%
Decreased dialogue	1	4%
Q3. How has your public awareness raising on civil society and on civic space changed? (See Pillar 1, provision II.2)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significantly increased public awareness raising	5	19%
Moderately increased public awareness raising	14	52%
Maintained existing levels of public awareness raising	6	22%
Decreased public awareness raising	2	7%
Q4. What obstacles do you face when engaging in dialogue with partner country governments and when raising public awareness on civil society and on civic space? (See Pillar 1, provision II.2)		
<i>N = 23</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q5. How has your co-ordination with other providers, and with international, regional and national bodies to protect civic space in partner countries changed (e.g. joint programming and/or funding, sharing information)? (See Pillar 1, provision II.3)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significantly increased co-ordination	3	11%
Moderately increased co-ordination	13	48%
Maintained existing levels of co-ordination	10	37%
Decreased co-ordination	1	4%
Q6. How have your efforts to do no harm to civic space in partner countries changed (e.g. conducting context analysis of partner countries, including civic space considerations, working with your country's line ministries to ensure policy coherence with other development objectives and policy areas)? (See Pillar 1, provision II.4)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significantly increased efforts	0	0%
Moderately increased efforts	13	48%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	14	52%
Decreased efforts	0	0%
Q7. How have your support and engagement with international, regional, and national bodies that work to protect civic space changed (e.g. providing funding, conducting dialogue, engaging in diplomatic efforts)? (See Pillar 1, provision II.5)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significantly increased support and engagement	2	7%
Moderately increased support and engagement	12	44%
Maintained existing levels of support and engagement	13	48%
Decreased support and engagement	0	0%
Q8. Have you supported partner country government institutions responsible for accountability and oversight? (See Pillar 1, provision II.6)		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Yes, to enable civil society in line with human rights	9	33%
Yes, to prevent unintended consequences due to misinterpretation or misapplication of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing standards	8	30%
Yes, for other reasons (please specify)	5	19%
Maintained existing levels of support	10	37%
No support has been provided	6	22%
Q9. Have you worked with the private sector and/or with independent media in partner countries to promote civic space and social dialogue? (See Pillar 1, provision II.7)		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Yes, with the private sector	7	27%
Yes, with independent media	13	50%
Maintained existing levels of work with the private sector	4	15%
Maintained existing levels of work with independent media	10	39%
No work has been done	5	19%
Q10. Have you developed and shared strategies to counter mis- and disinformation, harassment and discrimination targeting civil society? (See Pillar 1, provision II.8)		
<i>N = 19</i>		
Strategies have been developed at provider-country level	2	11%

Strategies have been shared with other providers	1	5%
Strategies have been shared with civil society actors	1	5%
Other steps have been taken (please specify)	11	58%
Maintained existing strategies already in place	7	37%
No strategies have been developed or shared	7	37%

Q11. How has your support for more civil society participation in public policies of partner country governments changed? (See Pillar 1, provision II.9)

N = 25

Significantly increased support	0	0%
Moderately increased support	11	44%
Maintained existing levels of support	14	56%
Decreased support	0	0%

Q12. How have your efforts to address challenges of digital technologies impacting civil society actors in partner countries changed? (See Pillar 1, provision II.10)

N = 23

Significantly increased efforts	3	13%
Moderately increased efforts	11	48%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	9	39%
Decreased efforts	0	0%

Q13. What obstacles do you face when respecting, protecting and promoting civic space? (See Pillar 1)

N = 19

Open-ended question.

Pillar 2. Supporting and engaging with civil society

Q14. Have you established policies or strategies for working with civil society in both partner countries and provider countries? (See Pillar 2, provision III.1)

N = 27

Yes, established policies and/or strategies	14	52%
Maintained policies and/or strategies already in place	12	44%
No policies or strategies have been established	2	7%

Q15. If yes, or have maintained a policy or strategy already in place, does it contain any of the following elements? (See Pillar 2, provision III.1)

N = 25

Has been developed in consultation with civil society	21	84%
Articulates objectives for working with a diverse range of civil society actors	19	76%
Aims to strengthen local ownership and an independent civil society in partner countries	23	92%
Takes into account contextual risks or opportunities for civil society and civic space	17	68%
Has been integrated into wider development co-operation, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding policies or strategies	24	96%
Has other elements (please specify)	6	24%

Q16. How has the participation of diverse civil society actors in your policies and programmes (e.g. priority-setting, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation) changed? (See Pillar 2, provision III.2)

N = 25

Significantly increased participation	3	12%
Moderately increased participation	12	48%
Maintained existing levels of participation	12	48%
Decreased participation	0	0%

Q17. Have you increased the availability of flexible and predictable financial support, e.g. core support and/or programme-based support, to diverse civil society actors? (See Pillar 2, provision III.3)

N = 27

Significantly increased flexible and predictable financial support	3	11%
Moderately increased flexible and predictable financial support	14	52%
Maintained existing levels of flexible and predictable financial support	9	33%
No flexible and predictable financial support is provided	3	11%
Decreased flexible and predictable financial support	3	11%

Q18. Have you promoted and invested in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries in any of the following

ways? (See Pillar 2, provision III.4)

N = 27

Increased the availability and accessibility of direct, flexible, and predictable support including core and/or programme-based support	10	37%
Supported civil society strategic alliances, networks, platforms and resource centres at regional, national, and sub-national levels	17	63%
Ensured local civil society actors are involved in decision-making (e.g. in the design, budgets, and implementation of their programming)	16	59%
Other measures have been taken to promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors (please specify)	10	37%
Maintained measures already in place	11	41%
No measure has been taken	2	7%

Q19. How have your efforts to explore and share lessons to best support a broad range of civil society actors changed (e.g. social movements, social economy actors, trade unions, and faith-based organisations)? (See Pillar 2, provision III.5)

N = 27

Significantly increased efforts	2	7%
Moderately increased efforts	7	26%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	17	63%
Decreased efforts	1	4%

Q20. How have your efforts to streamline administrative requirements for civil society support changed? (See Pillar 2, provision III.6)

N = 27

Significantly increased efforts	4	15%
Moderately increased efforts	16	59%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	7	26%
Decreased efforts	1	4%

Q21. How have your efforts to incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of civil society funding changed? (See Pillar 2, provision III.6)

N = 26

Significantly increased efforts	3	12%
Moderately increased efforts	10	39%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	14	54%
Decreased efforts	0	0%

Q22. How have the transparency and accessibility of information on your funding for civil society in partner countries changed? (See Pillar 2, provision III.7)

N = 26

Significantly increased transparency and accessibility of information	5	19%
Moderately increased transparency and accessibility of information	7	27%
Maintained existing levels of transparency and accessibility of information	13	50%
Decreased transparency and accessibility of information	1	4%

Q23. How have your support and work with civil society actors to advance global citizenship education changed? (See Pillar 2, provision III.8)

N = 24

Significantly increased support and work	4	17%
Moderately increased support and work	8	33%
Maintained existing levels of support and work	10	42%
Decreased support and work	3	13%

Q24. Have you worked with civil society actors to respect DAC and international standards related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and to ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment? (See Pillar 2, provision III.9)

N = 27

Yes, on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus	12	44%
Yes, on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment	14	52%
Maintained work that was already in place	11	41%
No work has been done	3	11%

Q25. Have you made any of the following efforts to advance respect for international humanitarian law and the principle of non-discrimination? (See Pillar 2, provision III.10.a)

N = 23

Pursued internal co-ordination across my government	9	39%
Conducted dialogue across my government	11	48%
Consulted with related institutions	14	61%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	14	61%
Other efforts have been made (please specify)	7	30%
No efforts have been made	1	4%

Q26. Have you made any of the following efforts to address obstacles to supporting civil society due to misinterpretation or misapplication of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing standards? (See Pillar 2, provision III.10.b)

N = 27

Pursued internal co-ordination across my government	6	22%
Conducted dialogue across my government	8	30%
Consulted with related institutions	8	30%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	12	44%
Other efforts have been made (please specify)	5	19%
No efforts have been made	3	11%

Q27. What obstacles do you face when supporting and engaging with civil society? (See Pillar 2)

N = 19

*Open-ended question.***Pillar 3. Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability****Q28. How have your calls on and support for CSO-led self-regulation, transparency and accountability mechanisms changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.1)**

N = 27

Significantly increased calls and support	2	7%
Moderately increased calls and support	9	33%
Maintained existing levels of calls and support	18	67%
Decreased calls and support	0	0%

Q29. How have your calls on and support for CSOs to prevent and respond to discrimination, exploitation, abuse, or harassment in their activities and organisations changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.2)

N = 27

Significantly increased calls and support	4	15%
Moderately increased calls and support	6	22%
Maintained existing levels of calls and support	18	67%
Decreased calls and support	0	0%

Q30. How has your work with and support for CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.3)

N = 27

Significantly increased work and support	4	15%
Moderately increased work and support	13	48%
Maintained existing levels of work and support	11	41%
Decreased work and support	0	0%

Q31. How has your support for more equitable partnerships between provider country and/or international CSOs, and the partner country CSOs they work with changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.4)

N = 25

Significantly increased support	2	8%
Moderately increased support	12	48%
Maintained existing levels of support	11	44%
Decreased support	0	0%

Q32. How have your efforts to promote participatory and rights-based approaches for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.5)

N = 26

Significantly increased efforts	1	4%
Moderately increased efforts	12	46%

Maintained existing levels of efforts	13	50%
Decreased efforts	0	0%
Q33. How have your efforts to foster CSO leadership and innovation for identifying and adapting new approaches to solving development and humanitarian challenges changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.6)		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Significantly increased efforts	0	0%
Moderately increased efforts	12	46%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	12	46%
Decreased efforts	0	0%
Q34. How have your encouragement and support for CSOs voluntary initiatives to collaborate and co-ordinate among themselves and with all levels of partner country governments changed? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.7)		
<i>N = 23</i>		
Significantly increased encouragement and support	0	0%
Moderately increased encouragement and support	10	44%
Maintained existing levels of encouragement and support	13	57%
Decreased encouragement and support	0	0%
Q35. Have you made any of the following requirements to CSO partners to respect human rights and open civic space in the partner countries they work in? (See Pillar 3, provision IV.8)		
<i>N = 25</i>		
Required respect to relevant international standards	15	60%
Adherence to relevant legal and regulatory requirements in partner countries they work in	12	48%
Maintained existing requirements that were already in place	16	64%
Made other requirements (please specify)	1	4%
No requirements were made	1	4%
Q36. What obstacles do you face when incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency, and accountability? (See Pillar 3)		
<i>N = 19</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q37. If you feel the DAC Recommendation could be better leveraged to advance CSOs effectiveness, transparency and accountability, please describe how. (See DAC Rec. Pillar 3)		
<i>N = 15</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
SECTION B. DISSEMINATION AND CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF THE DAC RECOMMENDATION		
Q38. Do you feel that the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose?		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Yes	23	89%
No	0	0%
Other (please specify)	3	12%
Q39. Overall, have you changed your policies and practices to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the provisions of the DAC Recommendation?		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Significant change through structural and organisational changes	1	4%
Moderate change through the development of new policies and programmes	19	70%
Broader policy changes that were likely to happen anyway	9	33%
No noticeable effect on our structure and way of working	1	4%
Q40. What measures have you taken to disseminate the DAC Recommendation?		
<i>N = 27</i>		
Dissemination efforts with staff of development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding Ministries and/or agencies	19	70%
Dissemination efforts across line ministries within the Adherent government	6	22%
Dissemination efforts with provider-country CSOs	8	30%
Dissemination efforts with partner-country CSOs	2	7%
Dissemination efforts with multilateral institutions	2	7%
Dissemination efforts with other providers	4	15%
Dissemination efforts with other actors (please specify)	6	22%

No specific action taken	3	11%
Q41. Do you have any suggestions as to how to improve dissemination efforts of the DAC Recommendation?		
<i>N = 14</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q42. Do you find the DAC Community of Practice on Civil Society to be a useful platform to collectively address common challenges in implementing the DAC Recommendation?		
<i>N = 25</i>		
Yes, very useful both at policy and implementation level	15	60%
Yes, important at policy level but not at implementation level	7	28%
To some extent (please specify)	2	8%
No, not noticeably	1	4%
Q43a. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support your implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? Toolkit on Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries		
<i>N = 25</i>		
Very useful	8	32%
Somewhat useful	15	60%
Not useful	0	0%
Not aware of this effort	2	8%
Q43b. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support your implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? Toolkit on Shifting Power with Partners		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Very useful	6	23%
Somewhat useful	17	65%
Not useful	1	4%
Not aware of this effort	2	8%
Q43c. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support your implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? Toolkit on Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Very useful	9	35%
Somewhat useful	14	54%
Not useful	1	4%
Not aware of this effort	2	8%
Q43d. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support your implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? Other (peer learning, workshops, dissemination tools visual guide, brochures, PPTs, etc.)		
<i>N = 23</i>		
Very useful	7	30%
Somewhat useful	15	65%
Not useful	0	0%
Not aware of this effort	1	4%
Q44. Do you have suggestions for how the OECD Secretariat could better support your implementation of the DAC Recommendation?		
<i>N = 15</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q45. Overall, would you say the topics covered by the DAC Recommendation continue to be relevant in the context of civil society policy and practice in your jurisdiction?		
<i>N = 26</i>		
Yes	26	100%
No	0	0%
Q46. If you feel that there are aspects of the DAC Recommendation that need adjustment, please describe why.		
<i>N = 8</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
SECTION C. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE		
Q47. Please describe any recent developments or emerging trends relating to enabling civil society in your jurisdiction.		
<i>N = 18</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		

Q48. Do you plan any significant shifts in your policies, programming and partnerships with CSOs? Please explain.

N = 19

Open-ended question.

Q49. Please add any aspect of the DAC Recommendation you feel is important but not covered by the questions above, or on any good practice examples you would like to flag for potential inclusion in the DAC Recommendations implementation Report.

N = 6

Open-ended question.

1.2. Questionnaire responses from CSOs

5. Responses to the CSO questionnaire were collected between October and December 2025, with a total of 39 CSOs (hereafter “CSO Respondents”) submitting their questionnaire response (see Figure 2.1 in Section 2. Methodology, for an overview of the distribution of CSOs responding to the CSO questionnaire). To ensure their anonymity throughout the implementation Report, CSOs’ insights are not attributed to specific respondents. Respondents could select more than one response option for any multiple-choice question. As a result, the total number of responses to a question may in some cases exceed the total number of respondents to that question (shown as N).

Table 1.2. Questionnaire responses from CSOs

Response option	Number of Responses	Percentage of CSO Respondents
SECTION A. IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBSTANTIVE PROVISIONS OF THE DAC RECOMMENDATION		
Pillar 1. Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space		
Q1. To your knowledge, how has the DAC member that is your organisation’s primary funder(s) (hereafter referred to as “DAC member institution(s)”) respected, protected, and promoted civic space since 2021?		
<i>N = 39</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q2. To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to respect, protect, and promote civic space since 2021?		
<i>N = 37</i>		
Significantly increased efforts	1	3%
Moderately increased efforts	13	35%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	12	32%
Decreased efforts	14	38%
Q3. In your experience, what obstacles does the DAC member institution(s) face when respecting, protecting and promoting civic space?		
<i>N = 37</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q4. From your perspective, what further actions does the DAC member institution(s) need to take to strengthen efforts to respect, protect, and promote civic space?		
<i>N = 38</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Pillar 2. Supporting and engaging with civil society		
Q5. To your knowledge, how has the DAC member institution(s) supported and engaged with civil society since 2021?		
<i>N = 38</i>		
<i>Open-ended question.</i>		
Q6. To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to support and engage with civil society since 2021?		
<i>N = 37</i>		
Significantly increased efforts	2	5%

Moderately increased efforts	12	32%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	15	41%
Decreased efforts	15	41%

Q7. In your experience, what obstacles does the DAC member institution(s) face when supporting and engaging with civil society?

N = 35

Open-ended question.

Q8. From your perspective, what further actions does the DAC member institution(s) need to take to strengthen efforts to support and engage with civil society?

N = 38

Open-ended question.

Pillar 3. Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability

Q9. To your knowledge, how has the DAC member institution(s) incentivised CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability since 2021?

N = 38

Open-ended question.

Q10. To your knowledge, to what extent has the DAC member institution(s) changed its efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability since 2021?

N = 35

Significantly increased efforts	4	11%
Moderately increased efforts	11	31%
Maintained existing levels of efforts	19	54%
Decreased efforts	4	11%

Q11. In your experience, what obstacles does the DAC member institution(s) face when incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability?

N = 33

Open-ended question.

Q12. From your perspective, what further actions does the DAC member institution(s) need to take to strengthen efforts to incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability?

N = 33

Open-ended question.

Q13. If you feel the DAC Recommendation could be better leveraged to advance CSOs' effectiveness, transparency and accountability, please describe how.

N = 27

Open-ended question.

SECTION B. DISSEMINATION AND CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF THE DAC RECOMMENDATION

Q14. Are you aware of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society?

N = 38

Have read the DAC Recommendation and/or a summary of its commitments	25	66%
Broadly aware of the DAC Recommendation and its purpose	10	26%
Have heard about the DAC Recommendation, but limited knowledge of its commitments	3	8%
Not aware of the DAC Recommendation	3	8%
Other (please specify)	0	0%

Q15. Do you feel that the DAC Recommendation serves its purpose?

N = 37

Yes	24	65%
No	1	3%
Other (please specify)	12	32%

Q16. In your experience, has the DAC Member institution(s) changed its policies and practices to advance an enabling environment for civil society in line with the DAC Recommendation (e.g. introducing new policies, expanding programmes, increasing access to financial support, or enhancing engagement with civil society actors)?

N = 37

Significant change through structural and organisational changes	1	3%
Moderate change through the development of new policies and programmes	20	54%

Broader policy changes that were likely to happen anyway	5	14%
No noticeable effect on the DAC Member institution(s)'s structure and way of working	14	38%

Q17. What measures have you taken, or participated in, related to the DAC Recommendation?*N = 33*

Discussed the DAC Recommendation with DAC provider(s)	11	33%
Discussed the DAC Recommendation with the OECD	14	42%
Discussed the DAC Recommendation with other CSOs	26	79%
Participated in an event about the DAC Recommendation organised by a DAC provider	11	33%
Participated in an event about the DAC Recommendation organised by the OECD	19	58%
Participated in an event about the DAC Recommendation organised by other CSOs	10	30%
Engaged in a consultation about the DAC Recommendation or related toolkits organised by a DAC provider	10	30%
Engaged in a consultation about the DAC Recommendation or related toolkits organised by the OECD	12	36%
Engaged in a consultation about the DAC Recommendation organised by other CSOs	15	45%

Q18. Do you have any suggestions as to how to improve dissemination efforts of the DAC Recommendation?*N = 22**Open-ended question.***Q19a. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? – Toolkit on Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries***N = 34*

Very useful	18	53%
Somewhat useful	9	26%
Not useful	1	3%
Not aware of this effort	6	18%

Q19b. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? – Toolkit on Shifting Power with Partners*N = 35*

Very useful	18	51%
Somewhat useful	11	31%
Not useful	0	0%
Not aware of this effort	6	17%

Q19c. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? – Toolkit on Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space*N = 34*

Very useful	17	50%
Somewhat useful	9	26%
Not useful	0	0%
Not aware of this effort	8	24%

Q19d. Which OECD Secretariat efforts to support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation have you found useful? – Other (peer learning, workshops, dissemination tools – visual guide, brochures, PPTs, etc.)*N = 25*

Very useful	6	24%
Somewhat useful	10	40%
Not useful	0	0%
Not aware of this effort	9	36%

Q20. Do you have suggestions for how the OECD Secretariat could better support the implementation of the DAC Recommendation?*N = 23**Open-ended question.***Q21. Overall, would you say the topics covered by the DAC Recommendation continue to be relevant in the context of civil society policy and practice in the context in which you operate?***N = 36*

Yes	36	100%
No	0	0%

Q22. If you feel that there are aspects of the DAC Recommendation that need adjustment, please describe why.

N = 16

Open-ended question.

SECTION C. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Q23. Please describe any recent developments or emerging trends relating to enabling civil society in the context in which you operate.

N = 35

Open-ended question.

Q24. In your experience, is the DAC Member institution(s) planning any significant shifts in its policies, programming and partnerships with CSOs? Please explain.

N = 33

Open-ended question.

Q25. Please add any aspect of the DAC Recommendation you feel is important but not covered by the questions above, or on any good practice examples you would like to flag for potential inclusion in the DAC Recommendation's implementation Report.

N = 16

Open-ended question.

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