



GUIDELINES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2017



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Foreword

The purpose of these Guidelines for Civil Society is to provide guidance for Finland's efforts to strengthen civil societies in developing countries as part of its development policy and steer the work of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Finnish civil society actors towards achieving the goals of Finland's development policy. The basic premise of the Guidelines is that **independent, vibrant, pluralistic and polyphonic civil societies create the prerequisites for the peaceful participation of citizens in society and for the realisation of human rights**. Civil society has played an important role in that Finland has developed into a democratic society and in promoting the welfare state. This is why Finland wants to support the civil society development also in other parts of the world.

Strengthening civil societies in developing countries is a major development policy goal, particularly now that the enabling environment for civil societies is restricted in a growing number of countries. **Finland wants its actions to provide a positive example of the opportunities and positive effects of dialogue between civil society actors** and the governments both nationally and internationally. Finland's experience shows that social trust is built on open dialogue between actors, where differing views are seen also as opportunities for the long-term and inclusive development of societies.

These Guidelines supersede the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' earlier Guidelines for Civil Society from 2010, in many respects serving as a continuum of them. The starting point of these updated Guidelines is the

Strengthening of civil societies is both a development policy goal and a means to achieve other goals of Finland's development policy.



strengthening of civil societies both as a development policy goal and as a tool means to achieve other goals of Finland's development policy. Therefore, this document is not limited to humanitarian and development cooperation carried out by civil society actors, but provides clearer guidance also for the development policy activities of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to reinforce civil societies.

The Guidelines for Civil Society are based on the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. In a global world, development challenges are shared, cross national borders and are multi-dimensional. For example, factors impacting climate change, conflict or economic development are highly intertwined. The 2030 Agenda affects developing countries and wealthier countries alike and challenges them to examine and develop their activities in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Civil society has an important role to play in achieving the SDGs and more broadly in development towards safe and secure, peaceful and inclusive societies.

The importance and role of civil society in development

In these Guidelines, **civil society** refers to the space outside the private and public sectors in which people can realise their active citizenship by participating in collective activities and debates. In this way, they can promote their own well-being and that of society. Civil society as a field of human activity can assume various forms of activity in different places. Civil society actors can form associations or choose some other way to organise themselves to participate and promote shared interests. In these Guidelines, **civil society actor** refers to non-profit associations, communities, networks and social movements, established on the basis of a common theme, goal or ideology, and also includes non-commercial media, foundations and research institutions.

The nature of civil societies involves **dynamism, polyphony, innovation and a critical review of the functioning of society's structures and activities**. Civil society actors have an important role in increasing people's knowledge about civil rights and obligations, helping to ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable people is heard, accumulating social capital, strengthening inclusion and promoting political and legislative reforms. In a polyphonic society, governments can better respond to the diverse needs of the people and promote democracy at the various levels of society. By promoting accountable governance and institutions and by mon-

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itoring their activities, civil society can support respect for human rights and the status of the most vulnerable groups. At its best, civil society provides opportunities for people to participate and influence peacefully and actively in societal development and public decision-making. However, it needs to be remembered that due to their diversity, civil societies also include actors that are not committed to promoting human rights and do not promote or enhance democracy or sustainable development.

Changes in societies lead to **changing practices** in civil societies. An increasing part of civic activity is loosely organised, spontaneous and fairly brief in duration. New forms of influencing have emerged alongside traditional association-based forms of activity. Interest and opportunities to participate in informal networks that use social media channels, for example, have increased.



There is a need to actively defend the civic space.

Global development in recent years has shown the need to actively defend the civic space. Several international reports indicate a narrowing of the space for civil societies in recent years both in developing countries and in wealthier states. This goes against international and Finnish development efforts. The CIVICUS State of Civil Society 2017 Report indicates that the civic space is currently restricted in more than one hundred countries. States control the activities of civil societies through, for example, various legislative measures, such as by making the process to register associations costly, bureaucratic and opaque, by subjecting them to various reporting requirements and by restrictions and regulations on the receipt of foreign funding. Harassment of civil society actors, invalidation and even violence are means to restrict and prevent the activities of civil societies.



In addition to state actors, the private sector can either directly or indirectly restrict the activities of civil societies. **Socially responsible private sector activities** require a free society and freedom of association. Most businesses benefit from an operating environment that is predictable, democratically governed and open. The best conditions for sustainable business are usually to be found in operating environments where also civil societies have good preconditions for action.

Free, pluralistic civil societies are not a foregone conclusion. Civil societies cannot function efficiently if communication is restricted, biased or even distorted. **The promotion of free communication and freedom of speech** are also important from the point of view of ensuring an enabling environment for civil societies. Therefore, there may be a great need to strengthen civil societies also in wealthier, yet democratically weak and corrupt countries.

Civil society actors are also present in areas which are inaccessible to state actors because of, for example, conflict, their location or some other reason. In emergencies, civil society organisations (CSOs) are also often the first ones to provide assistance before international actors arrive on the scene. CSOs have a key role in humanitarian assistance. Civil society actors play an important role in strengthening community resilience and in preparedness for and the prevention and resolution of conflicts and crises.



Finland's activities to strengthen civil societies

Strengthening civil societies in developing countries is an important goal in Finland's development policy. Civil society actors can significantly boost people's equal opportunities to engage in public debate and influence political decision-making. This strengthens democracy in societies. Strengthening civil societies is not only a goal in itself, but also a means for Finland to advance its other development policy goals.

Finland engages in policy dialogue in international forums to strengthen civil societies and secure their civic space in developing countries.

Finland engages in policy dialogue in international forums to strengthen civil societies and secure their civic space in developing countries. Finland influences the **EU's development agenda** and helps to make the voice of civil society actors heard in the EU's various policy areas, international financial institutions and the **UN system**. Finland continues to work with the European External Action Service in supporting civil societies. Finland also encourages UN organisations, the World Bank and regional development banks to focus increasingly and more extensively on the strengthening of civil societies. Civil society actors play an important role not just in promoting the SDGs, but also in developing the EU's and UN's functions and systems of agreements.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs defends the civic space by its actions and by promoting the strengthening of peaceful and democratic societies. This is where **dialogue between Finnish diplomatic missions** and local actors plays an important role. Diplomatic missions can highlight Finland's view of how the inclusion of civil society in societal decision-making can promote responsible exercise of power and peaceful societal change. Policy dialogue also takes place through EU delegations in developing countries. Delegations increase the opportunities for the diplomatic missions and the Ministry to obtain a comprehensive view of the state of civil societies in different parts of the world. Strengthening civil society is taken into account in the content and goals of Finland's Country Strategies for bilateral development cooperation when they are updated.

Finland is committed to **defending human rights defenders**. Human rights defenders do important work that is recognised and approved by international law. This work may, however, expose human rights defenders to personal risk. Civil society actors who visibly defend the realisation of human rights and on this basis criticise those in power in their country are in a particular danger zone. Finland complies with the EU's Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' policies derived from them to protect human rights defenders.

The Ministry provides funding for both Finnish CSOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) that contribute to the achievement of Finland's development policy goals and to strengthening civil societies. Funding is channelled to INGOs, whose activities support the achievement of

In all activities funded from the Ministry's development cooperation appropriations, attention must be given to practices that will strengthen civil societies.



Finland's development policy goals, complement the activities of Finnish organisations and enhance Finland's influence in international forums. Finnish diplomatic missions can also grant small-scale funding for the activities of local organisations.

In all activities funded from the Ministry's development cooperation appropriations, attention must be given to practices that will strengthen civil societies. Activities must not impair the enabling environment of the civil society.

Partnership with Finnish civil society organisations

CSOs are a key partner of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, as well as in the preparation of development policy guidelines through open dialogue. Such organisations – including those representing diaspora communities – have both special thematic expertise and long-term experience of development cooperation and societies in developing countries. This brings added value to the implementation of Finland’s development policy and supports Finland’s goal of strengthening civil societies in developing countries.

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Many Finnish organisations have long-term experience of partnerships with civil society actors in developing countries. In addition, they have experience of and insight into human rights based development cooperation and humanitarian activities **from the grassroots level up to international forums**. The working relations that a number of Finnish organisations also have with various levels of their partner country’s government also give the organisations an opportunity to promote **dialogue** between the local government and civil society actors. Organisations can bring the voice of local



civil societies to international debate and decision-making by supporting the networking of their partners and by promoting their participation in international forums. Through the dialogue, the actors can learn from each other, prepare common advocacy goals and establish new partnerships. **Networking** helps in the development of social innovations and in increasing information about them in Finland and in developing countries. Viewed from an international perspective, the culture of a low hierarchy can be considered a particular strength of Finnish organisations, which have valuable experience of equitable working methods both within civil society and in interaction between civil society and governments.

The participation of Finnish CSOs in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance **adds to the Finns' understanding of and competencies in development issues.** The organisations' activities in developing countries and the opportunities for participation and volunteering they provide forge contacts between Finns and the citizens of other countries. Successful communication concerning development is instrumental in that the Finns are ready to be actively involved in the promotion of global justice and burden-sharing. Understanding global problems can also reduce xenophobia and the social tensions arising from it in Finland. This is where Finnish civil society actors play an important role alongside official communications. Civil society actors convey information about the SDGs and about the changes sought, engage in civic education and inspire and guide people to create a more sustainable everyday life.

Principles steering the financing of CSOs' development cooperation

Finland considers that CSOs are in principle **independent and autonomous** actors that determine the goals of their activities and their working methods. Cooperation between organisations and the Ministry is based on shared values and goals, which enables activities benefiting both parties. Cooperation with state actors increases also the weight of civil society actors as defenders of the civic space.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs channels funding to Finnish CSOs, INGOs and CSOs in developing countries to achieve the goals of Finland's development policy. The Ministry sets various thematic, regional or country-level priorities for the funding it allocates. At the same time, the Ministry strives to take into account the diversity and special competencies of civil society. The Ministry directs its development cooperation funding only to activities which promote Finland's development policy goals.

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Finland has a **human rights based approach to development**, which steers Finland's activities also with civil society actors. This human rights based approach is grounded on Finland's international human rights com-



mitments and the Constitution of Finland. The human rights based approach to development means taking into account the human rights principles in the planning and implementation of development cooperation. The goal is the implementation of human rights obligations in developing countries. This requires compliance with sector-specific, internationally accepted human rights norms and standards in the development policy and development cooperation. In addition, development cooperation practices throughout the development cooperation cycle must meet internationally accepted human rights principles such as non-discrimination, the right of citizens to participate meaningfully and effectively in decision-making, the accountability of the authorities in decision-making and activities, and openness and transparency in all processes.

Finland is committed to the **principles of effectiveness**. Effective development cooperation requires that the development goals of the partner country are taken into account when projects are planned. Civil society actors' development cooperation is guided by the Istanbul Principles of CSO Effectiveness (2010) agreed among CSOs. In accordance with these principles, Finland requires that the organisations receiving funding are committed to non-violence and to the promotion of people's inclusive participation and human rights. They must strive together with other actors for positive, sustainable and openness-promoting societal change in all situations.

The strengthening of civil societies taking place through development cooperation and other advocacy work, and the successful choice of partners requires a **deep understanding of the working environment**. Different countries and culture-specific contexts also place their own challenges to civil society actors when selecting partners. Organisations must make informed choices, knowing whether they are looking for partners representing, for example, organisations at grassroots level or the most vulnerable groups' own citizens' movements or strong organisations focusing on advocacy work operating in the capital city. Creating an effective strategy requires knowledge of local legislation, political decision-making culture and power relations in society.

Results-based measurement requires that CSOs determine the results to be achieved by their actions and create the monitoring systems and ways means of verification to verify for the achievement of results. Organisations must show in their plans and reports of results that their activities promote Finland's development policy goals.

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The main goal of these Guidelines is to **strengthen civil societies** in developing countries. Organisations must specify in their plans how, for example, the provision of services or capacity-building of their developing-country partner through their projects will promote the strengthening and sustainability of the activities of civil societies in developing countries. At best, the theories of societal change that organisations prepare in cooperation with their partners gives the parties a tool for learning and for assessing the impact of their activities. The element of strengthening the civil society might remain more limited in situations where, for instance, activities are funded through an INGO primarily to promote a particular thematic goal.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs encourages organisations to carry out projects funded by the Ministry in **the least developed countries (LDCs)**. In addition, the objective of Finland's development policy is to reduce inequality, which is why organisations are encouraged to engage in development work with the poorest sectors of the population.



The Ministry for Foreign Affairs' future aim is that CSOs' development cooperation activities in partner countries will have a clearer **relationship to Finland's Country Strategies**. The Ministry conducts dialogue with organisations when Country Strategies are prepared and implemented. Complementarity between the projects funded and the goals of Country Strategies is pursued through cooperation and exchange of information.

The aim of the provision of services included in CSO projects must be that local authorities assume responsibility for organising the basic services for people. In fragile contexts where there are no working government structures, the services provided by civil society actors may, however, be people's only possibility to access such basic services as education and health care. Cooperation and dialogue with the public sector are a prerequisite for the long-term development of services. In order to achieve sustainable societal change, it is therefore essential that **the provision of services also involves advocacy work and ensures the transfer of skills and knowledge**.

The principles of **humanitarian assistance** channelled through CSOs are described in Finland's Humanitarian Policy.

Development results are achieved in cooperation

The activities of Finnish organisations as part of the implementation of Finland's development policy **are based on partnership, especially with civil society actors in developing countries**. In addition, civil society actors cooperate increasingly with local authorities, businesses and the media, among others.

CSOs are encouraged to engage in multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Cooperation between civil society and, for example, public administration or the private sector can result in new innovations and the sharing of best practices to development, which these actors would not be able to reach alone. Effective multi-stakeholder cooperation requires common goals, time and financial resources to commit to joint activities and the readiness to create shared operating models between at times very different operational cultures. New partnerships are formed based on competencies brought by cooperation that generates added value to the planned activities and their outcomes.

The goals of the 2030 Agenda pave the way towards **a new type of cooperation** between various actors and administrative branches. Joint efforts make it possible to create new kinds of learning, draw on the competencies of various actors and to allocate resources more effectively in order to achieve the SDGs. The Ministry encourages CSOs and other civil society actors to engage in innovative cooperation both among themselves and with other actors.

[Government Report on Finland's Development Policy \(2016\)](#)

[Human Rights Based Approach in Finland's Development Cooperation \(2015\)](#)

[Results Based Management in Finland's Development Cooperation \(2015\)](#)

[Finland's Humanitarian Policy \(2012\)](#)

[Protecting and Supporting Human Rights Defenders - Public Guidelines of the Foreign Ministry of Finland on the Implementation of the European Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders \(2014\)](#)

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