

Preliminary information about the call for proposals for programme-based support for 2026–2029

The purpose of this preliminary information is to provide applicants with information about the call for proposals before the official notice for the call is published on 20 January 2025. The notice for the call and final application criteria will be published when the call opens.

An updated version of the [instrument description](#) is available.

Call title

Discretionary government grants for Finnish civil society organisations' development cooperation programmes (programme-based support for 2026–2029)

Description of the call

The call for proposals concerns discretionary government grants for Finnish civil society organisations' development cooperation programmes and the possible humanitarian assistance they may include for 2026–2029. The grants are awarded from the development cooperation appropriations for Finnish civil society organisations' (CSOs) development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Programme-based support for Finnish civil society organisations contributes to achieving Finland's foreign and security policy objectives. Finland's development cooperation promotes the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the pledge to leave no one behind (LNOB), a guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda. As part of Finland's development cooperation, programme-based support strengthens the foundations for sustainable societal development, including functioning democracy, the rule of law, human rights and a vibrant civil society. Through programme-based support, Finnish CSOs strengthen active and diverse civil societies in developing countries and their operating conditions over the long term. Programme-based support places emphasis on promoting the rights of women and girls and people in a particularly vulnerable position in a systematic and multifaceted way. For programmes to be eligible for support, they must be in line with Finland's foreign and security policy and the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation. Under certain conditions, programme-based support may also be granted for CSOs' humanitarian work.

The methods and special expertise of the CSOs operating under programme-based support enhance the impact and effectiveness of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. Programme-based support is targeted at civil society actors capable of advancing development policy goals through their own strategies. The activities must have clearly defined results objectives and a long-term development impact. Programmes are implemented in broad collaboration with partner networks across multiple countries, emphasising strong local ownership. Operating with programme-based support requires solid knowledge of results-based management, monitoring and evaluation of the results and impacts, and risk management. Transparency and accountability are key principles of operation. In development cooperation, programmes must adhere to a human rights-based approach.

From 2026 onwards, programme-based support can also be granted for response activities to humanitarian emergencies by Finnish CSOs that have a partnership status with the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

CSOs' programmes may also support various nexus activities, which interlink the prevention of crises, development cooperation, peace process and humanitarian assistance to ensure effectiveness. Organisations without the ECHO status and thus ineligible for funding for humanitarian assistance may also include nexus activities in their programmes. In such cases, the nexus activities should not primarily include direct humanitarian assistance, and they will be assessed as part of the development cooperation programme using criteria applicable to development cooperation (not as part of humanitarian assistance and its criteria).

Programme-based support is discretionary funding under the Act on Discretionary Government Grants (688/2001) for Finnish CSOs' multiannual development cooperation and humanitarian programmes. Section 7 of the Act on Discretionary Government Grants includes provisions on the general grounds for awarding discretionary government grants.

When using government grant, the CSO commits to complying with Finnish legislation applicable to the implementation of development cooperation and the conditions governing the use of the awarded discretionary government grant. The relationship between recipients of discretionary government grants and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is governed by public law, and the recipient is also fully responsible for the use of the awarded grant to the extent that it is used in the target country and/or is transferred to assist a project or activity managed by another entity.

As a rule, documents related to programme-based support submitted to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including applications and their appendices, are public in accordance with section 1 of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999, hereinafter 'the Act on Openness'). If the applicant considers that the document contains confidential information under section 24 of the Act on Openness, this must be clearly indicated in the document in question. The applicant must also specify whether, in their opinion, the entire document is confidential, or only part of it. The applicant must provide justifications for their view on the confidentiality of the information. Justifications for confidentiality can be provided in a separate document. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs will make the final determination on the confidentiality of the information under the Act on Openness.

The application form and its appendices can be completed in Finnish, Swedish or English in the Applyforgrants.fi service. The decisions on discretionary government grants are made in Finnish or Swedish, depending on the language of the application.

Funds allocated in the call

The funds to be allocated in the call for 2026–2029 are estimated at up to EUR 320 million.

Beginning of the application period:

20 January 2025 at 9 am

End of the application period:

28 February 2025 at 16.15 pm

Target deadline for grant decisions:

8 months from the end of the call

Criteria for awarding

Applicable legal bases

1. Act on Discretionary Government Grants (688/2001)
2. Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003), sections 43(1), 44(1), 45(1) and 46

3. Act on Electronic Services and Communication in the Public Sector (13/2003), section 19 (13/2003)
4. Rules of Procedure of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (550/2008), section 90 (550/2008)

Criteria for awarding grants

To whom/for what grant can be awarded:

Grant funding is discretionary. Discretionary government grants can be awarded to applicants who meet the minimum requirements applicable to them, and whose application meets the minimum requirements for programmes.

The assessment of applications consists of minimum requirements, qualitative assessment criteria and an overall consideration. Applications will not proceed to the qualitative assessment phase if they do not fulfil the minimum requirements.

Meeting the minimum or other criteria does not automatically entitle the applicant to receive a grant. Decisions on grants are made based on the assessment of the applications. The call does not oblige the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to award grants to all applicants, nor to award the full amount requested by the applicant. If the applicant is granted less than was requested, the applicant must adjust their plans accordingly to the level of the awarded grant.

For applicants who have received government grants awarded by the Unit for Civil Society or other Ministry for Foreign Affairs units for 2026–2028, the application must specify the amounts awarded and the purpose of the grant. Any government grant awarded by the Unit for Civil Society for these years will be considered part of the programme if the applicant is awarded programme-based support. The applicant must clearly state in their application which portion of the programme's total funding for each year would be covered by any previously awarded grant. These government grants will generally be subject to the conditions of the previous grant decisions for as long as those decisions remain valid.

Minimum requirements for grant recipients

- The applicant must be an association or foundation experienced in development cooperation that meets the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria for Official Development Assistance (ODA). The applicant must have been registered or otherwise verifiably and actually operating in Finland for at least five years as of 28 February 2025, or the activities and responsibilities of an association or foundation that has operated in Finland for at least five years must be deemed to have been transferred to the applicant.
- The applicant must have experience of managing development cooperation and/or humanitarian assistance grants totalling at least EUR 1,500,000 during 2022–2024. These grants must have been awarded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and possibly also by the EU or a UN organisation, and must meet the OECD DAC criteria for development cooperation.
- The applicant's statutes must include a provision on development cooperation, or the applicant must submit a clarification to the Ministry on its development cooperation or other ODA-eligible activities.
- The applicant organisation's general administration must be appropriate in relation to the programme and the government grant applied for.

- The applicant organisation's financial management must be professional and appropriate in relation to the government grant applied for.
- The applicant is required to have balanced finances and fund-raising that supports its activities when applying for a grant, as well as for the three preceding financial years.

Minimum requirement for programme-based support for humanitarian assistance:

Funding for humanitarian activities can be applied for by Finnish organisations that, as of the end of the application period on 28 February 2025, have a partnership status with the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). However, if the applicant's ECHO partnership status changes in early 2025, the applicant may supplement the application in this respect until 30 April 2025 and the Ministry can take the situation into account in its decision-making. The organisation commits to adhering to humanitarian principles and follows the 'do no harm' principle.

Purposes for which grants can be awarded

The purpose of discretionary government grants is specified in the government grant decision and its appendices. Pursuant to section 13, subsection 1, of the Act on Discretionary Government Grants, discretionary government grants may be used only for the purpose stated in the government grant decision and its appendices.

Minimum requirements for the programme:

- The programme promotes the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals and is in line with Finland's development policy, taking the Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy and the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation into account.
- The programme complies with the instrument description for programme-based support.
- The programme meets the criteria for Official Development Assistance (ODA) as defined by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).
- The applicant demonstrates the required self-financing for the requested government grant in accordance with the conditions¹ for programme-based support to be published in January.

¹ The conditions for programme-based support for the 2026–2029 period will be updated and published alongside the notice for the call. The key changes regarding the self-financing contribution include the harmonisation of its amount and contents. Going forward, the self-financing contribution will be 10% of the approved annual costs. The self-financing contribution must be entirely covered in cash. Resources obtained free of charge (e.g. volunteer work) may still be included in programmes, but voluntary work cannot be used to cover the self-financing contribution. In programmes or components in which the primary objective is to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, the self-financing contribution is 5%, and this must be covered entirely in cash. In programmes that include humanitarian assistance, the grant use must be detailed so that humanitarian assistance and the programme's development cooperation component can be reported separately. In such programmes, the self-financing contribution applies to the development cooperation part. For humanitarian assistance, costs can be fully covered by the government grant, and no self-financing is required. This applies only to grant recipients that are ECHO partners.

The standard terms and conditions for programme-based support outline exceptions for entities that differ structurally or operationally from other organisations engaged in development cooperation. For the current programme period, these entities include Finnish Development NGOs Fingo and the special foundations, Abilis Foundation, KIOS Foundation and Siemenpuu Foundation.

- The programme has mechanisms in place to ensure that its activities do not negatively affect the realisation of human rights (the 'do no harm' principle). The organisation has guiding principles and verifiable processes to ensure non-discrimination, accessibility, inclusiveness and equal treatment.

Information about the application materials and required appendices will be announced in the notice for the call in January 2025.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs grants funding based on the Act on Discretionary Government Grants and the standard terms and conditions for programme-based support that will be published in January 2025. Applicants should familiarise themselves with these terms and conditions before applying. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs may also impose special conditions on decisions on discretionary government grants.

Applicants that have the ECHO humanitarian partnership certificate may also apply for programme-based support for humanitarian activities. The Ministry will make an overall decision on programme-based support, allowing the grant recipient to use an unallocated share (see below) and apply for permission to alter the plan for the use of funds within the conditions of the grant. If the applicant applies for both humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, they must specify in the application the proportion allocated to each for each year. If the applicant wishes, they may indicate an order of priority concerning different countries or projects in humanitarian assistance in the application. On a case-by-case basis, the Ministry may consider the applicant's prioritisation as part of the overall consideration. If the grant is awarded for both development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, the Ministry will define the respective proportions for each in the decision. The grant recipient must ensure that the portion allocated for humanitarian assistance is used at least to the extent granted. The budget for each humanitarian project included in the programme must be at least EUR 500,000 per country per year.

For justified reasons, organisations that have the ECHO humanitarian partnership certificate may include new countries of operation for humanitarian aid in their programme during the programme period. This requires the Ministry's approval before the operations begin. The proposal should be based primarily on:

- 1) humanitarian needs such as a sudden crisis or a significantly deteriorated humanitarian situation;
- 2) the organisation's activities bringing clear added value and complementarity to humanitarian action taking into account needs assessment, humanitarian response plan and coordination carried out in the country or region in question;
- 3) a realistic risk assessment and risk management measures.

In limited cases, all organisations receiving programme-based support may still apply to the Ministry for permission to alter the plan for the use of funds from development cooperation to humanitarian work in acute crisis situations. However, the exemption from self-financing concerning humanitarian assistance applies only to grant recipients that are ECHO partners.

Applicants may reserve 10% of the requested grant from the Ministry for flexibility, without having to allocate it when submitting the application. If the organisation is awarded a grant, this 10% unallocated share can be included in the granted amount. Detailed planning of this portion must be made as part of the annual financial planning and presented to the Ministry for approval as part of the annual planning or through a separate modification proposal during the programme implementation. The planned activities must correspond to the approved programme and its objectives. This portion may be reserved for activities such as developing partnerships with

businesses or other multistakeholder cooperation models, or for meeting the co-financing requirement for international or private funding. The use of funds requires the Ministry's approval before the activities are started.

Purposes for which grants cannot be awarded

Discretionary government grants may not be used for parts of the grant recipient's operations for which the grant was not awarded.

Uses deviating from the purpose of the government grant include economic activities that cause more than minor distortion to competition and the market in a member state of the European Economic Area.

An illustrative list of non-eligible costs will be included in the standard terms and conditions to be published in January 2025.

The Ministry may also impose special conditions related to the purpose of the grant in its decisions.

Assessment criteria

The assessment of the fulfilment of the criteria and overall consideration are examined taking the content, structure and methods of the applicants' operations into account. For development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, the criteria are applied in relation to the programme's content and the funding applied for.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs will use available material concerning the use of government grants by applicants, such as annual reports and any external reviews/audits conducted between 2022 and 2025. If no external review or audit of the applicant's general/financial and risk management has been carried out by the Ministry between 2022 and 2025, the Ministry may conduct one as part of the assessment of the applicants and their applications.

The following section describes the preliminary assessment criteria for this call. The final, potentially more specific, assessment criteria will be published in the notice for the call in January 2025.

Preliminary qualitative assessment criteria for programmes

Programme objectives, results matrix and results based management

For development cooperation:

- Targeted results and indicators for measuring them, including data disaggregation and the setting of baselines and target levels.
- The sustainability of the targeted results and impacts from the perspective of different countries or results areas of the programme.
- The programme's monitoring and evaluation plan, learning from results, the sharing and use of the lessons in the programme, the promotion of accountability and transparency, and a plan for publishing results. (*Joint criterion: humanitarian assistance and development cooperation*)

For humanitarian assistance (separately):

- Targeted results and indicators for measuring them, including data disaggregation. The use of technical standards. How does the multiannual approach contribute to sustainable humanitarian outcomes?

Target groups

For development cooperation:

- Selection and definition of rights holders and duty bearers in relation to the programme's objectives, analysis and consideration of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and attention to those who are in a vulnerable position.
- Ownership of the rights holders and duty bearers.
- The consideration and promotion of women's and girls' rights and participation, and gender equality. *(Joint criterion: humanitarian assistance and development cooperation)*
- The consideration and promotion of the rights, participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the programme. *(Joint criterion: humanitarian assistance and development cooperation)*

Programme operating environments and implementation

For development cooperation:

- The programme's added value and linkage to the status and operational conditions of local civil societies. Approach and tangible means and actions for strengthening civil societies, civic space, and the operating environment for CSOs more broadly.
- The programme's added value for local actors, the use of local networks in programme implementation, and the coordination of actors to enhance impact and reduce overlap. *(Joint criterion: humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. For humanitarian assistance, this is assessed especially from the perspective of local coordination mechanisms.)*
- The added value of regional and global networks in programme implementation.

Partnerships with local civil societies

- Civil society partnerships influencing the programme's implementation and their share of the programme, the selection of partners, the role of partners within local civil societies, and whether the programme is based on the partners' goals or strategies. This criterion does not apply to programmes primarily implemented in Finland.
- The programme's approach and methods for capacity building: exchange of knowledge and skills, mutual learning, and co-creation. Which actors' capacities are supported, and what is the basis for capacity support? How is the programme used to support the independence and financial autonomy of actors? How does the programme support the self-regulation, transparency and accountability mechanisms of civil society actors? *(Joint criterion: humanitarian assistance and development cooperation)*
- How does the programme take into account the strengthening of local leadership (outside the applicant organisation) in terms of strategy, financing and resources, partnerships, capacity building, and decision-making?

For humanitarian assistance (additionally):

- Criteria for selecting areas of assistance and the population to be assisted (beneficiaries), as well as sectors of assistance (particularly from the perspective of acute humanitarian needs).

Risk management

The assessment of the entire risk management section considers both development cooperation and potential humanitarian assistance.

Concerning the applicant organisation, the following are assessed:

- Appropriate risk management structures and guidelines, risk management systems.
- Clear and relevant responsibilities for risk management, including an analysis of the responsibilities of the applicant and partners as part of the programme's implementation.
- Monitoring of transferred grants: supervision of sub-recipients, i.e. partners using government grants, in Finland and the countries of operation, supporting partners in preventing, managing and addressing risks when necessary.
- The applicant's practices for preventing the financing of terrorism and money laundering.
- The applicant's methods for ensuring compliance with sanction systems.

Risk management related to programme implementation:

- The programme's risk management plan, its monitoring and updating. Comprehensive and appropriate identification of and preparedness for risks, including the assessment of probability and impact, preventive actions, and corrective action plans concerning the achievement and sustainability of programme results.
- Accountability channels such as feedback or whistleblowing channels through which rights holders/duty bearers/stakeholders can report any detected irregularities or suspicions of abuse or mismanagement.
- The applicant's and the programme's practices for preventing the risks of sexual exploitation, sexual violence, sexual harassment and abuse of power.
- The applicant's and the programme's practices for preventing the risks of bribery, corruption and financial misconduct.

Budget and financing

For development cooperation, the following are assessed:

- The structure and justification of the programme's implementation. The justification of the programme's cost structure. The applicant's and partners' expertise and the expertise used in the programme, including expertise acquired through partnerships and volunteer work. The realism, reasonableness, appropriateness and justification of the resources (including personnel) allocated to the programme in relation to the programme's set goals/results objectives.

For humanitarian assistance, the following are assessed separately:

- The proportion of the budget allocated to activities/costs directly benefiting beneficiaries. The clarity and justification of personnel costs. The justification, reasonableness and

consistency of the budget with the application. The cost structure of the programme and the role of partners.

Overall consideration

In addition to the above minimum requirements and qualitative criteria, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs uses overall consideration concerning individual applications and the portfolio of programmes in relation to the available appropriations. For the supported programmes, the overall consideration includes the portfolio of programme applications in relation to Finland's development policy objectives and the objectives set out in the instrument description for programme-based support, as well as the appropriations available for the call.

Overall consideration also includes the following elements:

- The programme's alignment with Finland's development policy objectives and the instrument description, conditions and limitations of programme-based support.
- How the programme's objectives support Finland's foreign and security policy goals.
- The programme's methods for supporting and promoting the operating conditions and environment of the private sector in the programme countries.
- The selection of operating environments and the justification for the programme's relevance and added value in relation to the chosen environments and other actors operating in those environments.
- The relevance and added value of the programme concerning private sector partnerships and multistakeholder collaboration.
- The potential use of the [triple nexus approach](#) (the collaboration between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding) and the added value it brings to the programme, including nexus-related collaboration, consistency and complementarity.
- The relevance and added value concerning the least developed countries (as defined by the OECD), fragile countries and Finland's support for Ukraine. (Fragile countries are defined in the call as per the OECD's States of Fragility 2022 report; see https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/states-of-fragility-2022_c7fedf5e-en.html, country-specific infographic 1.1).
- How the applicant has taken into account the relation of its programme activities to other activities supported by Finland's development cooperation funding.
- Verified experiences and assessments collected by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs concerning the applicant and their previous use of government grants.
- Justification for the funding requested for the programme in relation to 1) the applicant's current government grants from the appropriations of the Unit for Civil Society's budget allocation table item and 2) the scope of the applicant's development cooperation programmes and humanitarian activities.

According to the Report on International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation, Finland's development cooperation is conditional on cooperation in the readmission of a country's own citizens and support for the international rules-based system. Finland does not engage in development cooperation with governments or actors that support Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

For humanitarian assistance, the overall consideration also examines the portfolio of programmes in relation to Finland's humanitarian assistance as a whole. The consideration also takes assistance delivered through multilateral partners into account and examines the overall geographical and

sectoral distribution. As part of the overall consideration, the Ministry may also take the potential order of priority set by the applicant concerning different countries or projects in humanitarian assistance into account.