

## OECD Webinar on Enabling Civil Society and Civic Space in a Changing Landscape

21 November 2025

A recording of the webinar is available on [OECD TV](#).

### Key Takeaways

#### ***1. Development landscape is changing, with severe impacts on civil society***

Official development assistance (ODA) budgets are tightening across providers, and support for civil society organisations (CSOs) alongside support for human rights and democratic participation is projected to decline.<sup>i</sup> Many CSOs face financial insecurity, and some are at risk of closure,<sup>ii</sup> alongside high levels of emotional strain and burnout. At the same time, according to ICNL's most recent data, cuts to ODA and geopolitical shifts are emboldening states worldwide to increase restrictions on civic space such as on civil society's ability to access resources, stigmatization of civil society's legitimate activities, and constraints on peaceful assembly.

#### ***2. When civil society is at risk, so are effective sustainable development outcomes***

An enabled civil society and open civic space is fundamental for democratic societies, economic prosperity, and global stability. Yet the trends of today's development landscape impede civil society's capacity to access resources and operate effectively, whether in providing essential services, promoting accountability and oversight in the use of development funds, representing local voices, especially from marginalised and vulnerable communities, advocating for human rights, or taking action to prevent or counter shrinking civic space. The impacts thus extend well beyond individual CSOs or the civil society sector as a whole as they undermine the collective effort to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

#### ***3. CSOs and providers are adapting to a changing environment***

CSOs are diversifying their funding sources such as by partnering with philanthropy and the private sector and through economic activities. They are also exploring ways to cut or share costs, such as by reducing programming, mergers and fiscal sponsorships. Some providers are adopting new financing models, digital tools, and locally driven approaches to maximise impact with constrained resources. Others are working to simplify administrative procedures and compliance requirements to reduce transaction costs for both providers and CSOs and remove barriers for local CSOs' access to funding. In today's constantly evolving landscape it is worthwhile to continue to share experience and lessons.

#### ***4. The DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance continues to be highly relevant***

In this evolving landscape, the DAC Recommendation continues to serve as a key guiding framework. Its commitments to protect and promote civic space, support and engage CSOs, and incentivise CSOs' accountability and transparency provide a "North star" for providers and CSOs. Sustaining political attention on the Recommendation is essential to maintain momentum, as is practical guidance to support its effective implementation. The Recommendation's principles hold enduring relevance, particularly in times of crisis such as faced today, and fulfilling them is a shared responsibility of both providers and CSOs.

## 5. *Priority actions moving forward*

- Supporting civil society through long-term, predictable and flexible funding with proportionate risk consideration, and protecting civic space through diplomatic dialogue proactive and preventive actions, and multilateral engagement, ensuring CSOs' participation throughout.
- Improving co-ordination and information sharing within and among providers, drawing on local CSO perspectives and guidance provided in the OECD toolkits to implement the DAC Recommendation.
- Engaging other development actors, including multilateral development banks and regional bodies, to leverage broader accountability and support.
- Consulting CSOs on navigating ODA cuts, ensuring local priorities guide decisions.
- Investing in CSO financial sustainability, supporting a broader range of civil society actors such as social movements, and promoting enabling legal frameworks to strengthen civil society resilience in the face of future challenges.

### **The OECD Development Co-operation Directorate extends thanks to the webinar speakers:**

**Anabel Cruz** – Founding Director of the Communication and Development Institute Uruguay, co-coordinator, Rendir Cuentas and Open Government Partnership Steering Committee member

**Marianne Haugh** – Senior Adviser and Civic Space Co-ordinator, Section for Human Rights and Civil Society, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

**Nikhil Dutta** – Senior Legal Advisor, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

**Valérie Grenier-Lafon** – Deputy Director, Program Policy and Partnerships Unit, Global Affairs Canada and co-chair of the Development Assistance Committee Community of Practice on Civil Society

### ***For more information, please follow the links or scan the QR code below:***

- [DAC Recommendation](#) on Enabling Civil Society
- [Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries](#) toolkit
- [Shifting Power with Partners](#) toolkit
- [Co-ordinating Action for Civic Space](#) toolkit
- [Visual guides of key messages from the toolkits](#)



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<sup>i</sup> OECD (2025). [Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Accountability Lab, Humentum and Global Voices (2025). [Global aid freeze tracker](#).